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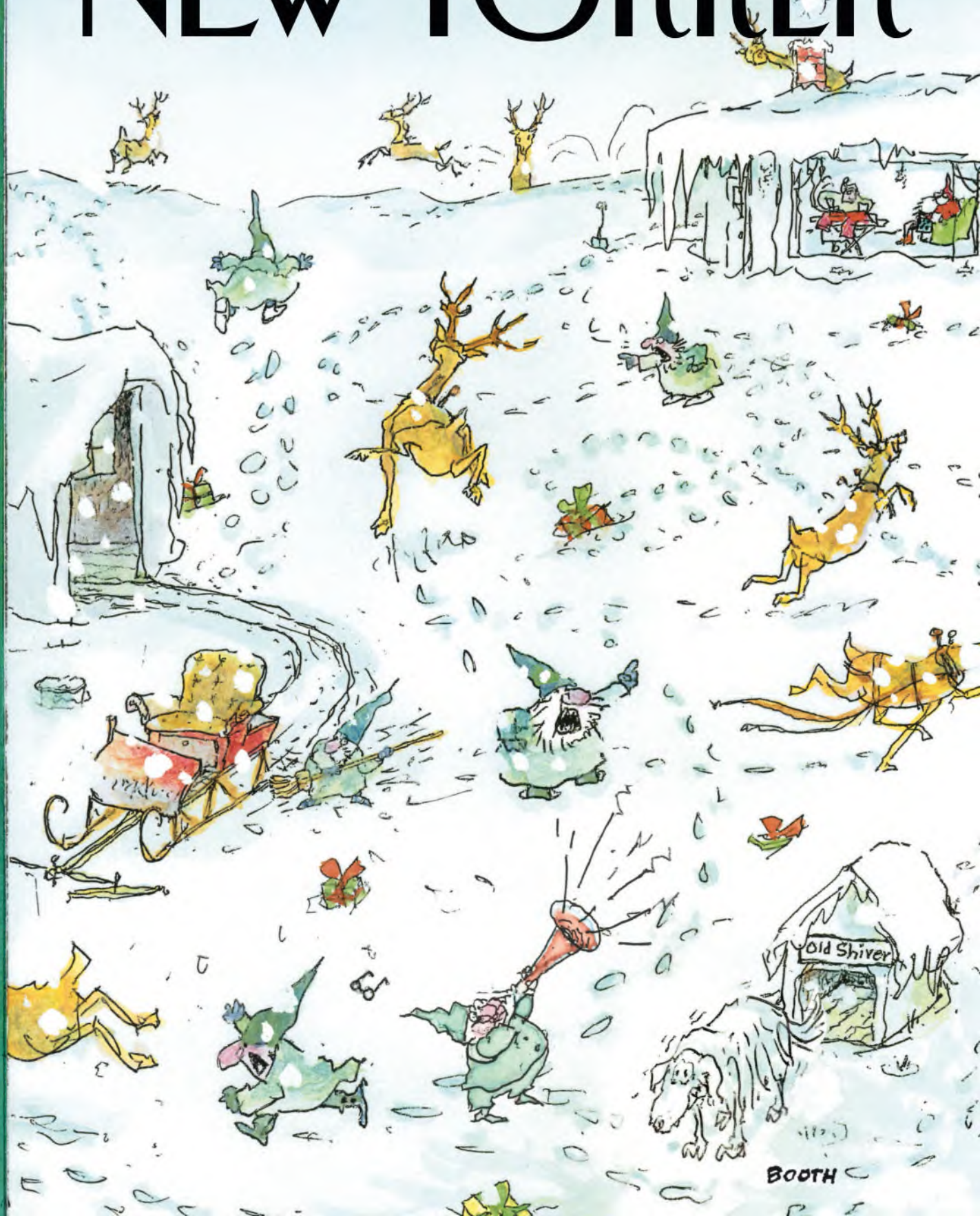


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ROBERT PINSKY 54
IAN FRAZIER 84

POEMS
"The Robots"
"Greetings, Friends!"

GEORGE BOOTH

COVER
"Holiday Spirit"

DRAWINGS Edward Steed, Mick Stevens, Tom Toro, Drew Dernavich, P. C. Vey, John Klossner, Liam Francis Walsh, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Farley Katz, Harry Bliss, Shannon Wheeler, Paul Noth, Barbara Smaller, Jack Ziegler, Zachary Kanin, Tim Hamilton, Emily Flake, David Sipress, Benjamin Schwartz **SPOTS** Sarah Illenberger



"We didn't want to know the gender in advance."



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ALSO:

DAILY COMMENT / CULTURAL COMMENT: Opinions and analysis by Jeffrey Frank, Emily Nussbaum, and others.

FICTION AND POETRY: Robert Pinsky reads his poem, and Tim Parks reads his short story.

PODCASTS: On the Political Scene, Ryan Lizza joins Dorothy Wickenden for a discussion about the divisions within the Republican Party. On Politics and More, Emily Nussbaum talks with Lindy West about sexual violence on television.

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THE YEAR IN REVIEW: Richard Brody writes about why 2015 was a bad year for Hollywood but a terrific one for movies. Plus, *New Yorker* contributors on their favorite books from the past year.

HUMOR: A Daily Cartoon on the news, by Benjamin Schwartz.

VIDEO: Manu Prakash discusses the Foldscope and the beauty of the microscopic world. And, on the latest episode of "Comma Queen," Mary Norris talks about how to use the ellipsis.

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MIND AND MACHINE

Nick Bostrom's work on superintelligence, as described in Raffi Khatchadourian's article, envisions the Singularity involving an "intelligence explosion"—the development of A.I. that can improve itself and rapidly achieve intelligence greater than that of humans—and weighs the potential effects for good or ill ("The Doomsday Invention," November 23rd). But there may be much more likely scenarios. In order to reach an intelligence explosion, there would have to be an incremental advancement of A.I.—before we get to the super A.I. brain, we will need to develop a lot of mediocre A.I. brains. What if humanity finds A.I. mediocrity good enough? What if something fundamental in humanity itself prevents A.I. from getting to the point of an intelligence explosion in the first place? Or, what if adversarial groups of humans develop competing A.I. systems that get along no better than their inventors do? Imagining a one-way path to an intelligence explosion—no matter how fascinating or how far in the future—can leave out a lot of messy, but much more probable, details.

*Randy Levine
Denver, Colo.*

In the Khatchadourian piece, a scientist claims that A.I. could resolve climate change, disease, and poverty in ways beyond human capacity. But these systemic problems are not only the result of a lack of intelligence or resources or logistics. There is plenty of food, money, and even plain old human intelligence devoted to confronting these problems. What we don't have is the ability to overcome outmoded and counterproductive evolutionary survival urges: hoarding against famine becomes greed, self-protection becomes aggression, alertness to danger becomes xenophobic fear, the reproductive imperative for survival becomes overpopulation. Expecting A.I. to solve all of this for us is asking for it to outsmart us. The alternative is fostering human

intelligence globally, allowing people to understand, acknowledge, and temper their behavior. Will that take five hundred years? Do we have that much time?

*Paul Farrell
Cambridge, Mass.*

In discussing the extinction potential of technology, Khatchadourian mentions Bostrom's relative dismissal of natural threats, writing, "NASA spends forty million dollars each year to determine if there are significant comets or asteroids headed for Earth. (There aren't.)" This is not reassuring: as Carl Sagan used to remind us, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The most obvious failing of the current research program is that it focusses on near-Earth objects to the exclusion of distant long-period comets, which, given their typical speed and size, may not be discovered soon enough for us to be able to do anything to stop them from colliding with Earth. The powers that be argue that the minuscule chance of such a comet wreaking havoc does not justify mounting a Manhattan Project-size effort in preparation. Yet Bostrom's own observation refutes this line of reasoning. As Khatchadourian writes, "No matter how improbable extinction may be, Bostrom argues, its consequences are near-infinitely bad; thus, even the tiniest step toward reducing the chance that it will happen is near-infinitely valuable." We have the means, both technological and financial, to add insurance to our survival, and we do nothing. Perhaps the most likely cause of human extinction is faulty reasoning.

*Joel Marks, Professor Emeritus of
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Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

DECEMBER	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
2015	16TH 23RD	17TH 24TH	18TH 25TH	19TH 26TH	20TH 27TH	21ST 28TH	22ND 29TH

GIRL GROUPS OF THE NINETEEN-SIXTIES helped cement themes in American pop that have stuck to this day: glamour, adolescence, scandal, and the tension between capturing old, universal sentiments and instituting new ones. Ronnie Spector, of the pivotal group the Ronettes, was, and still is, an easy choice for poster girl. At seventy-two, she remains sinuous and spritely; sharpened by adversity, she is emblematic of those volatile sixties, which look more familiar with each turbulent, new headline. These days, Spector sits between songs, but her exuberant performances are a lesson in pop history. She promises the “Best Christmas Party Ever” at City Winery, Dec. 22-23; with standards like “Be My Baby” and classic renditions of “Sleigh Ride” and “Frosty the Snowman,” it’s a hard holiday evening to beat.

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THE THEATRE | NIGHT LIFE
DANCE | MOVIES
ABOVE & BEYOND
FOOD & DRINK

PHOTOGRAPH BY RUVEN AFANADOR

CLASSICAL MUSIC



Peter Schickele, the man behind the comic persona of P.D.Q. Bach, is also a talented composer of serious music.

FORGOTTEN SON

P.D.Q. Bach plays a fiftieth-anniversary show at Town Hall.

THE SOLEMN RITUALS THAT ATTEND classical music have long made the genre an irresistible target for mockery, most of it obvious and crass. From time to time, though, a knowing insider produces a satire of classical pretensions that approaches the sublime. The honor roll of great put-ons includes Anna Russell's impression of a vocal recitalist in majestic decline; Gerard Hoffnung's decimations of mid-twentieth-century British concert life; Victor Borge's Dada take on the itinerant piano virtuoso; and, of course, Peter Schickele's anarcho-Baroque incarnation of P.D.Q. Bach (1807-1742), who is habitually described as the last of Johann Sebastian Bach's twenty-odd children, and also the oddest. P.D.Q. made his public debut in 1965, at Town Hall; fifty years on, Schickele, adopting his familiar guise as a professor of musical pathology at the University of Southern North Dakota at Hoople, returns to the scene of the original crime.

Every master parodist must have mastery of the art under attack. Schickele brings to bear consummate skill as a composer and an instantly recognizable musical voice. Much of the pleasure of the P.D.Q. pieces—"Iphigenia in Brooklyn," "The Stoned Guest," and "Wachet Arf!"—are typical titles—comes from their combination of the risible and the hummable: you're never quite sure whether P.D.Q. was an incompetent composer or a visionary one, his malfunctioning-sewing-machine textures interlaced with touches of bluegrass, minimalism, and rock and roll. At times, the ingenuity of the jokes is breathtaking: in Schickele's "Quodlibet," themes from the nine Beethoven symphonies are piled on top of one another, all sharing a tonic-dominant progression. Which is not to say that Schickele is ever in danger of being excessively refined. The jokes go low; the puns border on the wretched. Little about the anniversary concert, on Dec. 28,

can be predicted except that the host will make his traditional entrance swinging from a rope.

The comic fame of P.D.Q. has inevitably overshadowed Schickele's serious output. His Bassoon Concerto appears on "Full Moon in the City," a new recording from the Oberlin Music label—one that also contains bassoon-and-ensemble works by Augusta Read Thomas, Libby Larsen, and Russell Platt, a colleague here at *The New Yorker*. Witty, elegant, concise, and affecting, the concerto shows Schickele as a latter-day Haydn. He is the one American composer whose name makes everyone smile.

—Alex Ross

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Annualized Total Return by Sector (1985-2015): Health Care (14.93%); Consumer Staples (14.47%); Energy (11.15%); Consumer Discretionary (11.13%); Industrials (10.94%); Technology (10.73%); Utilities (10.49%); Financials (10.41%); Materials (10.04%); Telecom (9.16%).

Standard Deviation of Annual Total Returns (1985-2015): Technology (25.45%); Materials (20.73%); Consumer Discretionary (19.27%); Financials (19.26%); Energy (19.08%); Telecom (18.93%); Industrials (17.72%); Health Care (15.93%); Consumer Staples (14.32%); Utilities (14.02%).

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OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Jeremy Sams's production of Johann Strauss II's **"Die Fledermaus"** maximizes the operetta's Viennese milieu by setting the action on New Year's Eve, 1899. But the forced fun that marred the production's premiere, in 2013, has given way to a lighter, more confident touch from Susanna Phillips (a creamy-voiced Rosalinde), Paulo Szot (a blustering Falke), Toby Spence (a likably louche Eisenstein with a lean timbre), and Susan Graham (who sports a spiky white wig as the Russian prince Orlofsky, hysterically channeling the glamorous real-life Siberian baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky). The effervescent score sometimes goes flat in James Levine's hands, but Betsy Wolfe and Christopher Fitzgerald, in the speaking roles of Ida and Frosch, bring plenty of dizzy, contagious energy to the show. (Dec. 18 and Dec. 23 at 8 and Dec. 28 at 7:30.) • **Also playing:** For this year's family-friendly holiday show, the Met presents its trimmed-down, English-language version of Rossini's bel-canto sparkler **"The Barber of Seville."** Clocking in at two hours, the show puts young faces in starring roles, including Isabel Leonard as Rosina and Elliot Madore as Figaro, with David Portillo and Taylor Station sharing the part of Almaviva. Antony Walker conducts Bartlett Sher's vibrant production; Ginger Costa-Jackson and David Pershall step in for Leonard and Madore, respectively, on Dec. 29. (Dec. 16 and Dec. 21 at 7:30, Dec. 19 at 8, Dec. 24 and Dec. 29 at 7, and Dec. 26 at 1.) • Michael Mayer's exuberant but effective Las Vegas-themed production of **"Rigoletto"** turns Verdi's drama of scheming Italian courtiers into a carnival of American excess. Roberto Abbado conducts the final performance of the season, pacing a cast led by Nadine Sierra, Jean-François Borras, and Željko Lučić (in the title role). (Dec. 17 at 7:30.) • Paul Curran's bare production of **"La Donna del Lago"** is an odd fit for Rossini's pastoral-tinged score, but it's an effective showcase for the mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, who, with her compact voice and sprightly technique in coloratura passages, more or less owns the Rossini-heroine repertoire. She's in good company with her fellow bel-canto specialists Lawrence Brownlee, John Osborn, Daniela Barcellona, and the conductor Michele Mariotti. (Dec. 19 at 1, Dec. 22 at 7:30, and Dec. 26 at 8. These are the final performances of the season.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic: "Messiah"

For many years, the orchestra, primarily associated with Romantic repertory,

has provided an excellent rendition of Handel's beloved oratorio, leavening the natural heft of its sound with a modicum of period-performance restraint. The British maestro Jane Glover, in a long-overdue debut, leads the concerts, which feature the vocal soloists Heidi Stober, Tim Mead, Paul Appleby, and Roderick Williams, with the Westminster Symphonic Choir. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 15-17 and Dec. 19 at 7:30 and Dec. 18 at 11 A.M.)

Choir of Trinity Wall Street: "Messiah"

The librettist of "Messiah," Charles Jennens, once referred to his renowned collaboration with Handel as an "entertainment"; no rendition in New York comes closer to that spirit than this one, which, with the Trinity Baroque Orchestra, under the baton of Julian Wachner, conveys an unalloyed and vibrantly contemporary sense of joy. (Alice Tully Hall. lincolncenter.org. Dec. 17 at 7:30. Note: Wachner also leads performances at Trinity Church on Dec. 16 and Dec. 26.)

American Symphony Orchestra: "Russia's Jewish Composers"

Leon Botstein's latest program with his intrepid ensemble points the spotlight on several lesser-known composers from late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Russia, each of whom put a different emphasis on their ethnic identity. Among the New York and U.S. premieres are works by Alexander Krein, Mikhail Gnesin, and Stravinsky's competitor Maximilian Steinberg (the Symphony No. 1 in D Major), along with the Cello Concerto No. 2 by the Russian Liszt, Anton Rubinstein (with the soloist István Várdai). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 17 at 8.)

Oratorio Society of New York / Musica Sacra: "Messiah"

Kent Tittle, New York's choral magus, conducts both of these longstanding ensembles. The first, an excellent avocational group, will offer a heartily affirmative performance of Handel's monument, in Mozart's fascinating arrangement; the second, a smaller, highly professional chorus, will likely give a leaner and more elegant rendition of the standard version. The vocal soloists include the winning bass Matt Boehler, who sings on both occasions. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 21 at 8 and Dec. 22 at 7:30.)

"The Little Match Girl Passion"

David Lang's Pulitzer Prize-winning masterpiece for chorus and percussion—a vivid, unexpected, and deeply moving treatment of the Hans Christian Andersen children's story—has a holiday home at the Metropolitan Museum. This year, it is performed

by the outstanding Choir of Trinity Wall Street and its conductor, Julian Wachner. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 23 at 7.)

New York String Orchestra

A treasured tradition at Carnegie Hall, this annual convocation of young virtuosos is conducted by Jaime Laredo. The guest for the mostly Mozartean Christmas Eve program is Emanuel Ax, the soloist in Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-Flat Major; the later concert features the young violinist Jinjoo Cho in Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, the capstone of a program that begins with music by Barber (the Adagio) and Schubert (an arrangement of the Quartet No. 14, "Death and the Maiden"). (212-247-7800. Dec. 24 at 7 and Dec. 28 at 8.)

RECITALS

Evgeny Kissin: "Jewish Music and Poetry"

Bringing technically masterful and keenly personal interpretations to the stage of Carnegie Hall is nothing new for this pianist, whose enigmatic approach to a carefully considered repertoire continues to place him among the great living artists. In this concert, he opens up his somewhat closed public persona to interrogate some musical aspects of his own heritage, performing three rarely heard twentieth-century works on Jewish themes—sonatas by Ernest Bloch and Alexander Veprik, and the "Suite Dansée" of Alexander Krein—between which the pianist will read selections by the Yiddish poet Yitzhak Leybush Peretz. (carnegiehall.org. Dec. 16 at 8.)

Danish Piano Trio

The exciting new trio, which has just released a recording of neglected works by Danish Romantic composers, makes its U.S. debut at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall, offering Mendelssohn's surging Trio No. 1 in D Minor along with the dulcet Trio in F Major by the nineteenth-century master Niels Gade; the American premiere of "Abgesänge" ("Swan Songs"), by one of Denmark's preeminent composers, Bent Sørensen; and a world-première work by Geoffrey Gordon. (212-247-7800. Dec. 17 at 8.)

Meredith Monk and Anne Waldman

Both Monk, the composer-performer, and Waldman, the poet, are devoted experimentalists who have helped to define the city's downtown scene since the nineteen-sixties. They will collaborate for the first time at Danspace Project this weekend. The evening opens with Waldman, performing a reading of her new "Entanglement Variations"; then Monk and her ensemble will present excerpts from the song cycle "Cellular

Songs," a work-in-progress that, like the recent "On Behalf of Nature," draws its inspiration from the natural sciences (specifically epigenetics). Afterward, the two women will join forces in an as-yet-unspecified collaboration, which will likely contain music, singing, and movement. (St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Dec. 17-19 at 8.)

S.E.M. Ensemble

Petr Kotik's group, long devoted to the masters of the postwar avant-garde tradition, returns to the Paula Cooper Gallery for its annual concert. This iteration, which features such guest artists as the vocalists Kamala Sankaram and Jeffrey Gavett, offers music by Xenakis ("Kassandra"), Alvin Lucier (the U.S. premiere of "Orpheus Variations"), Lisa Hirsch, and other moderns, as well as a surprise: the Serenata in C by the seventeenth-century Czech Moravian composer Pavel Jan Vejvanovský. (521 W. 21st St. brownpapertickets.com. Dec. 19 at 8.)

Peoples' Symphony Concerts: The Knights and Lise de la Salle

The febrile French pianist, a young player who rocketed to attention almost a decade ago, comes to Town Hall to play with members of the dynamic Brooklyn chamber orchestra. The program includes pieces by Martinů, Takemitsu, Judd Greenstein ("Be There"), Mozart (the Piano Quartet in G Minor), and Ravel (the Piano Trio in A Minor). (123 W. 43rd St. Dec. 20 at 2.)

Baryshnikov Arts Center: "Celebrating Misia Sert"

Misia!—pianist, patron, salon beauty, and friend and instigator of genius on the Franco-Russian spectrum, from Diaghilev and Proust to Chanel and Toulouse-Lautrec. One event could hardly contain her influence, but the baritone Michael Kelly and the pianists David Fung and Roman Rabinovich will nobly try, performing works by Satie and Ravel ("Histories Naturelles" and "La Valse"). The concert will also allow the audience to view a Cocoteau drawing of Diaghilev and set and costume designs by Benois and Bakst, from Mikhail Baryshnikov's personal collection. (450 W. 37th St. 866-811-4111. Dec. 16-17 at 7:30.)

Bargemusic

One of the floating chamber-music series' fondest traditions is enacted every year on Christmas Eve by the expert and very musical pianist Steven Beck, who performs, on the house Steinway, Bach's Goldberg Variations. Chocolate and apple cider are complimentary. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. Dec. 24 at 7:30. For tickets and full schedule, see bargemusic.org.)

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THE DRIPPING POINT

MOMA charts the evolution—and the liberating breakthrough—of Jackson Pollock.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART is showing nearly all of what it owns by Jackson Pollock—some sixty works, most of them rarely seen prints and drawings, that date from 1934 to 1954—in its second-floor graphics galleries. Why? That is, besides: Why not? It's a boon. Pollock's lifelong intensity and, at his peak, sublimity do not pale. The trajectory of his too brief career retains a drama, as evergreen as a folktale, of volcanic ambition and personal torment attaining a lift-off, with the drip technique, that knitted a man's chaotic personality and, with breathtaking efficiency, revolutionized not only painting but the general course of art ever after. (It can be argued, and has been, that the matter-of-factness of Pollock's flung paint germinated minimalism.) There's even, for anyone susceptible to it, a lingering nationalist sweetness: Pollock's peak period as the V-E Day of American art.

MOMA may be dangling bait to philanthropic collectors, in the form of the lacunae in its holdings. True, no other museum has more Pollocks. And none other boasts perhaps his single most satisfying work, the songful "One: Number 31, 1950," more than seventeen feet wide: interwoven high-speed skeins in black, white, dove-gray, teal, and fawn-brown oil and enamel bang on the surface while hinting at cosmic distances. (The Metropolitan's "Autumn Rhythm" and, at the National Gallery, in Washington, "Lavender Mist," both also from 1950, are its chief rivals.) MOMA also has the transitional touchstone "The She Wolf" (1943)—a picture ferociously conflicted between Jungian voodoo and exasperated originality—and a rough gem from the artist's blocked, sad last years, "White Light" (1954). But the museum's only other big drip painting is the audacious but awkward early "Number 1A, 1948" (the one with handprints

across the top). MOMA has lasting cause to rue the tardiness with which, at the opportune time, it picked up on Pollock and other Abstract Expressionists. Eurocentrism died hard on West Fifty-third Street.

Pollock was eighteen when he arrived in New York from California, in 1930, and began to imbibe the influences of Thomas Hart Benton, who was his teacher at the Art Students League, and the Mexican muralists. The early works in the show are a thrill ride of quick studies, as Pollock devours those models and then suggestions from Picasso, Miró, and André Masson—paying off in lyrically inventive engravings, from the early forties, that are a revelation here. Pollock was always Pollock, though he was long in agonizing doubt, notably about his ability to draw. Dripping brought a rush of relief, as he found a steadying and dispassionate, heaven-sent collaborator: gravity. Drawing in the air above the canvas freed him from, among other things, himself. "Number 31" is the feat of a fantastic talent no longer striving for expression but set to work and monitored. He watched what it did. We join him in watching. Pollock redefined painting to make it accept the gifts that he had been desperate to give. Any time is the right one to be reminded of that.

—Peter Schjeldahl

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MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"Kongo: Power and Majesty." Through Jan. 3.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Picasso Sculpture." Through Feb. 7.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"Alberto Burri: The Trauma of Painting." Through Jan. 6.

THE WHITNEY MUSEUM

"Frank Stella: A Retrospective." Through Feb. 7.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Agitprop!" Through Aug. 7.

DIJIA:CHELSEA

"Robert Ryman." Through June 18.

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

"Jacob Riis: Revealing New York's Other Half." Through March 20.

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

"A Constellation." Through March 6.

GALLERIES SHORT LIST

UPTOWN

Julie Ault

Galerie Buchholz
17 E. 82nd St. 646-964-4276.
Through Jan. 16.

Troy Brauntuch

Petzel
35 E. 67th St. 212-680-9467.
Through Jan. 9.

Jane Freilicher

De Nagy
724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
212-262-5050.
Through Jan. 23.

CHELSEA

Josephine Halvorson / Leslie Hewitt / Jennie C. Jones
Sikkema Jenkins
530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.
Through Jan. 23.

Ilya & Emilia Kabakov

Pace
510 W. 25th St. 212-255-4044.
Through Jan. 23.

Deborah Kass

Kasmin
515 W. 27th St. 212-563-4474.
Through Jan. 23.

Yoko Ono

Rosen
525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.
Galerie Lelong
528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470.
Both through Jan. 23.

DOWNTOWN

Guo Fengyi

Edlin
212 Bowery, at Spring St.
212-206-9723.
Through Jan. 31.

Robert Smithson

Cohan
291 Grand St. 212-714-9500.
Through Jan. 10.

"To Whom It May Concern:
Photographs from
the Archives of Haaretz
Newspaper."

Feldman
31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232.
Through Jan. 30.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

MOMA PS1

"Greater New York"

This transgenerational group exhibition is a deeply thoughtful if muted affair, with one selfie-baiting exception: an installation of twenty-four figurative sculptures on the second floor. They range from John Ahearn's loving, life-size rendition, in painted cast fibreglass, of a South Bronx mother and daughter, made in 1987, to a statue encrusted in beads—a giddy hybrid of Umberto Boccioni and Bootsie Collins—completed last year by the Mexican-born, Brooklyn-based Raúl de Nieves. Standing sentinel is "Kali Bobbit," a slapstick warrior-goddess in the form of a mannequin wearing thigh-high stockings and a belt full of knives, made in 1994 by the feminist pioneer Mary Beth Edelson. Elsewhere, L.G.B.T. issues are prominent, seen through scrim of both nostalgia (Alvin Baltrop's candid photographs of gay men cruising on the West Side piers in the post-Stonewall seventies) and rage (the AIDS activism of the collective Fierce Pussy). Charles Atlas trains his video camera on the drag legend Lady Bunny as she champions the disenfranchised in an impassioned rant that could give Bernie Sanders a run for his money. Through March 7.

American Folk Art Museum

"Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet"

"Ah Jean Dubuffet / when you think of him / doing his military service in the Eiffel Tower / as a meteorologist / in 1922 / you know how wonderful the 20th Century / can be." That's how Frank O'Hara began his poem "Naphtha." The lines, befitting the offbeat charisma of the great French artist, come to mind in this fascinating show of outsider art from a collection with which Dubuffet (1901-85) sought to beget a climate change in the artistic cultures of Europe and the United States, where the collection resided, in an East Hampton villa, from 1951 to 1962. Starting in 1945, he acquired works by untutored prisoners, children, people hospitalized for mental illnesses, and eccentric loners, mostly French, Swiss, or German, to make a point: "civilized" art was false to human nature and redeemable only by recourse to primal authenticities. Dubuffet's claim to have tapped a universal creative wellspring can seem murky. For one thing, there's an inevitable period bias in any collection. (Ghosts of Joan Miró and Paul Klee haunt this one.) For another, naïveté is never absolute. Through Jan. 10.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Enrico Baj

The Milanese firebrand, whose Arte Nucleare movement of the fifties aimed kitsch and satire at a world shadowed by atomic weapons, thought

seriously and painted otherwise. This essential show opens with a wonderful two-part mural from 1971, festooned with ribbons and fabric scraps, a cheeky update of Seurat's famous "Sunday on La Grande Jatte" (a child by the lake is now framed by a shock of blue hair). Upstairs are earlier forays into burlesque and bad taste, including modifications of cheesy thrift-store paintings: curvaceous nudes and lakeside villages beset by aliens and flying-saucer invasions. The most surprising works here are flat assemblages depicting furniture. Don't be misled by their melancholic appearance—they're a perverse breed of zombie, created with elements salvaged from actual chests of drawers. Through Dec. 23. (Luxembourg & Dayan, 64 E. 77th St. 212-452-4646.)

Takesada Matsutani

The Japanese artist was part of the postwar Gutai movement, which made a virtue of freedom and performance, but the earliest works here were created in the late sixties, after Matsutani had moved to Paris. Paintings from his early days in France suggest the geometries of Ellsworth Kelly or Kenneth Noland. Their semicircles of red and triangles of green look pretty decorative now, but sculptures from the same period, especially those made by coating wooden dowels with vinyl adhesive, have an enduring surreal charm. In two new wall-spanning works, both black, graphite or ink runs off the paper and onto the floor, residue of a performative painting technique that would make the old guard of Gutai proud. Through Dec. 23. (Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970.)

Gina Osterloh

The promising work of this conceptual artist from Los Angeles falls somewhere between drawing and photography—and between being and nothingness. First, she sketches loose grids on large sheets of paper, or spray-paints paper with rows of soft-focus black dots, which she cuts into silhouettes of people huddled in groups. Then she photographs the tableaux—scenes of flatness that sneak a curious volume into the pictures. Everything in Osterloh's world seems to be on the verge of dissolving—even the artist herself, in a video in which she tries to merge with her own shadow. Through Dec. 19. (Higher Pictures, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-249-6100.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Thomas Roma

Beginning in 2008, Roma began taking a series of ambiguous, charged portraits and landscapes in the Vale of Cashmere, a section of Prospect Park frequented by men cruising for sex, seventy-five of which are on view here. The men in the portraits

agreed to be photographed, and, while some look uneasy, others confront the camera with a calm assurance. Many of the landscapes present the park as an oasis of isolation and comfort, but it's also a site of pursuit, as seen in a number of panoramic sequences of men following paths deep into the woods. Through Dec. 23. (Kasher, 515 W. 26th St. 212-966-3978.)

Cary Smith

Smith, who paints hard-edged abstractions, is a virtuoso of balance in disproportion. Six of the dozen new works here feature intersecting diagonal lines of two distinct thicknesses and suggest mosaics. Elsewhere, Smith daubs swatches of color against taxicab yellow and Tiffany blue, and tessellates white ovoids in a field of red and black. Most of the paintings are square—think Malevich, think Instagram—and Smith's deployment of asymmetric components in an equilateral frame has, in the best cases here, the sprightly invention of a Coltrane cadenza. Through Jan. 9. (Fredericks & Freiser, 536 W. 24th St. 212-633-6555.)

Bjorn Sterri

From Julia Margaret Cameron to Sally Mann, photographers have long found their muses close to home, in their own families. Sterri taps into that tradition in a series of tender, probing images of his wife and two sons, made during the past fifteen years. Gazing at the camera as if looking into a mirror, they look alternately contented, concerned, amused, and even blissful. Sterri casts himself as a comically stern dad, whether he's seen stepping into the frame with the others or taking it over entirely for an occasional self-portrait, one of which finds him naked in a shallow grave, as if to suggest that, without his loved ones around him, life isn't worth living. Through Jan. 9. (Wester, 526 W. 26th St. 212-255-5560.)

Martha Wilson

Wilson, the artist who founded the crucial avant-garde space Franklin Furnace, doubles down on Duchamp in her lenticular self-portrait, "Mona / Marcel / Marge," in which La Gioconda sports Marge Simpson's blue beehive in addition to the famous drawn-on moustache. Wilson's images tend to be one-liners; in the diptych "Bear In Mind / Bare in Hind," she dons a panda mask in one frame and moons the camera in the next. But such puns are leavened by politics; in the past, Wilson has satirized Nancy Reagan and Barbara Bush. Here, she styles herself as Michelle Obama, with half of her face and body painted black. The deliberately partial use of the loathsome minstrel-show trope makes the stakes of the picture clear: in a country as riven as ours, such a parody is defeated before it's begun. Through Dec. 22. (P.P.O.W., 535 W. 22nd St. 212-647-1044.)



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Detail of the Sydney Opera House. Photo by Jack Atley, courtesy of Sydney Opera House Trust. Text and design ©2015 J. Paul Getty Trust



THE THEATRE

ALSO NOTABLE

ALLEGIANCE
Longacre

THE COLOR PURPLE
Jacobs

DADA WOOF PAPA HOT
Mitzi E. Newhouse

DAMES AT SEA
Helen Hayes

GIGANTIC
Acorn. Through Dec. 20.

THE GIN GAME
Golden

HAMILTON
Richard Rodgers

HIR
Peter Jay Sharp

THE HUMANS
Laura Pels

THE ILLUSIONISTS—LIVE ON BROADWAY
Neil Simon

INCIDENT AT VICHY
Pershing Square Signature Center. Through Dec. 20.

INVISIBLE THREAD
Second Stage. Through Dec. 27.

KING CHARLES III
Music Box

LAZARUS
New York Theatre Workshop.
(Reviewed in this issue.)

MARJORIE PRIME
Playwrights Horizons

MISERY
Broadhurst

MOTHERSTRUCK!
Lynn Redgrave Theatre

NEW YORK ANIMALS
New Ohio. Through Dec. 20.

ON YOUR FEET!
Marquis

ONCE UPON A MATTRESS
Abrons Arts Center

PIKE ST.
Abrons Arts Center.
Through Dec. 19.

SPRING AWAKENING
Brooks Atkinson

STEVE
Pershing Square Signature Center

SYLVIA
Cort

THÉRÈSE RAQUIN
Studio 54

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE
Lyceum



Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong wrote the songs for "These Paper Bullets!," a new play with music at the Atlantic Theatre Company, which resets "Much Ado About Nothing" in sixties London, featuring a "fab four" called the Quartos.

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Annie
A holiday engagement of the perennially sunny musical. Martin Charnin, who wrote the lyrics, directs for the nineteenth time. Dec. 16-20. (Kings Theatre, 1027 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn. 718-856-5464.)

The Changeling
Red Bull Theatre stages Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's Jacobean tragedy, directed by Jesse Berger and featuring Manoel Felciano, Sara Topham, and Christian Coulson. Previews begin Dec. 26. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

Fiddler on the Roof
Danny Burstein plays Tevye, the shtetl patriarch, in Bartlett Sher's revival of the 1964 musical, based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem. In previews. Opens Dec. 20. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

How Alfo Learned to Love
In Vincent Amelio's play, directed by Daisy Walker, a man will lose his family's Italian bakery to his married sister unless he finds true love. Previews begin Dec. 16. Opens Dec. 20. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Mother Courage and Her Children

Tonya Pinkins plays the indefatigable war profiteer in Brian Kulick's production of the Brecht play, featuring music by Duncan Sheik. In previews. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111.)

Noises Off

The Roundabout revives Michael Frayn's backstage farce from 1982, with a cast including Andrea Martin, Tracee Chimo, Campbell Scott, Jeremy Shamos, and Megan Hilty. Jeremy Herrin directs. Previews begin Dec. 17. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

Our Mother's Brief Affair

Lynne Meadow directs Richard Greenberg's play for Manhattan Theatre Club, starring Linda Lavin as an ailing mother who reveals a shocking secret to her children. Previews begin Dec. 28. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

Sancho: An Act of Remembrance

At the Next Wave Festival, the Royal Shakespeare Company actor Paterson Joseph portrays Charles Ignatius Sancho, the first African-British man to cast a vote. Dec. 16-20. (BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

NOW PLAYING

A Child's Christmas in Wales

The lovely rolling rhythms of Dylan Thomas's remembrances of childhood yuletides in Swansea—originally a radio broadcast, and first recorded by the poet in 1952—emerge only fitfully in the Irish Rep's adaptation, by Charlotte Moore, who also directs. Dividing the monologue up among the five-actor ensemble feels forced and choppy. Though beautifully sung, the frequent segues into traditional and Welsh Christmas songs also lessen the impact of the flowing word. And the grown-up actors' occasional adopting of child-like timbres doesn't help, either. Even the stalwart senior cast member John Cullum struggles, giving hesitant readings with book in hand. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-727-2737.)

China Doll

This ignoble effort by the storied playwright David Mamet tells a tale of avarice and spiritual poverty. Mickey Ross (Al Pacino) is a businessman who spends a great deal of time in the course of the two-hour piece on the phone, dealing with his private plane, taxes, and other matters. He has an assistant, Carson (Christopher Denham, a lovely player), who gets Ross's fellow crooks on the line for him, but Carson wants power,

too. As in many of Mamet's better plays, a younger man aspires to the moral rot of his mentor while the older resents getting old at all—and rages against it. Pacino's performance is all ego and hyperbole; it's more important for him to be seen than to act, and when he does it's so bad you wish he'd stop. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Golden Bride

Though the script and score are painstaking recreations of a once-popular Yiddish musical comedy, last staged in New York City in 1948, this muscular production is no museum piece: Bryna Wasserman and Motl Didner direct a buoyant, full-voiced cast of twenty, and Zalmen Mlotek's fourteen-piece orchestra shifts effortlessly between Old World melancholia and New World swing. (Izzy Fields deserves special notice for a delectable array of period costumes.) The plot is fluff—a woman raised in a Russian shtetl inherits a fortune, moves to America, and offers marriage to any suitor who can find her mother—but even at its silliest it's an often touching time capsule of the hopes and fantasies of Jewish immigrants circa 1923 (complete with an unexpected anthem extolling “the

new Russia”). The story ends with a masquerade ball, but the whole show glows with the joy and energy of a great party. In Yiddish, with English and Russian supertitles. (Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Pl. 646-437-4200.)

Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom

Teen-agers in an ominous suburban subdivision have become obsessed with a violent video game, and the players and their parents discover too slowly that the game has seeped into reality. Jennifer Haley's genuinely frightening script lives in the same neighborhood as David Lynch, David Cronenberg, and George Saunders, without feeling derivative; she's toying with dark ideas about adolescent rage, virtual realities, and American conformity, which only grow more disquieting as the play lingers in the mind. (It's hard not to make the grim connection, intentional or not, between the play's young killers and the real world's Internet-indoctrinated teen-age mass murderers.) Joel Schumacher, best known for helming Hollywood blockbusters, directs with black humor and a bare-bones aesthetic. The performances vary, but the

horror is real. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. Through Dec. 20.)

School of Rock

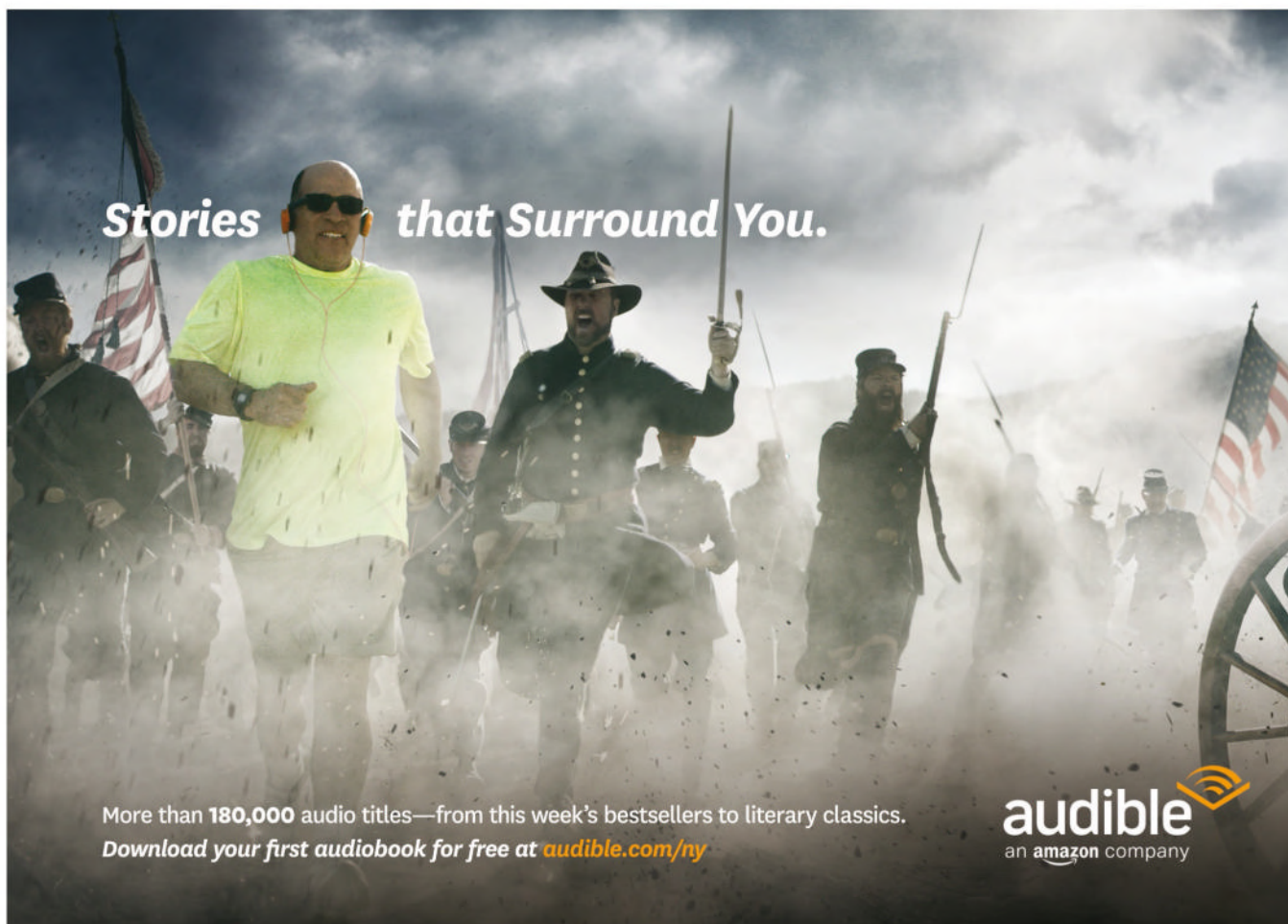
Andrew Lloyd Webber is a showman who knows how to send his audiences home happy (or, in the case of “Cats,” puzzled into submission), and his newest musical goes straight for the pleasure center. Adapted from Richard Linklater's 2003 film, which featured a devil-eyed Jack Black, it boasts an equally exuberant performance by Alex Brightman, who has all of Black's roly-poly mania and then some. He plays Dewey Finn, a deadbeat rocker who poses as a substitute teacher at Horace Green, a preppy elementary school where the students wear maroon uniforms and the principal (Sierra Boggess) is protocol incarnate. (It would be nice if the female characters weren't all killjoys.) Like a latter-day Harold Hill, Dewey transforms his classroom into a heavy-metal band—and Lloyd Webber's tunes, with lyrics by Glenn Slater, really do rock. But the chief triumph of Laurence Connor's production is the child actors, who give winning, distinctive performances while playing their own instruments, as Lloyd Webber assures us in a pre-show announcement. (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

Take Care

If the audience-participation spectrum ranges from light crowd work to hostage situation, this “scored participatory performance” falls decidedly on the abduction end. (At a minimum, you will be told to wear a plastic poncho, and you will need it.) Conceived by Nigel Smith and Todd Shalom in collaboration with the Bats, the Flea's young resident acting troupe, the show is a grab-bag of vignettes, songs, open-mike confessionals, audience instructions, and other assorted mayhem, centered on the theme of hurricanes and drawing heavily on worry and frustration over climate change, racial injustice, and their intersection. The tone is ever-shifting—at first cheerfully rambunctious, then aggressive, sardonic, goofy, righteous, and despairing—and the show feels like a cross between a Nickelodeon game show and an overearnest undergraduate discussion group. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

A Wilder Christmas

The Peccadillo Theatre Company stages a pair of holiday-themed one-act plays by Thornton Wilder, “The Long Christmas Dinner” and “Pullman Car Hiawatha,” under the direction of Dan Wackerman. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 866-811-4111.)



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NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Carnage

With just a handful of releases to his name, this electronic producer has demonstrated an expertise in revved-up, sugar-rush club music that sets some of the wildest voices rapping, from the lead-tongued trio Migos, on "Bricks," to the infantile wails of iLoveMakonnen, on "I Like Tuh." It's the sonic equivalent of a cocktail so sweet it masks the bite: Carnage likes things loud and bright, and he's a regular at face-melting festivals like Electronic Daisy Carnival and Ultra. But don't expect a stream of trap, the of-the-moment hip-hop strain, when he takes the reins at Webster Hall's grand ballroom: he's known to slip into tears of deep house and other eccentric club styles for as long as patrons can keep up. (125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. Dec. 19.)

Dan Deacon

Baltimore's prince of kaleidoscopic loft-party noise-pop is still carrying the art-rock torch, even as the basement venues he once headlined are rapidly being replaced by luxury condos and startups. Deacon has stayed relevant, in part by setting his sights a little higher than Charm City; for the past month, he's been on the road, opening for Miley Cyrus and the Flaming Lips, easily his biggest tour to date. This evening, he settles in for his own show at this North Brooklyn bowling alley, rounding out the year with the sort of mutant dance party for which he's known. (Brooklyn Bowl, 61 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg. 718-963-3369. Dec. 29.)

Mac Miller

Appearing relatable, even familial, is a primary task for new artists trying to attract fans, maybe more so now than in any previous era. Pittsburgh's Miller was barely eighteen when he released the breakout tracks "Senior Skip Day" and "Kool-Aid and Frozen Pizza," mirroring the sentiments of high-schoolers nationwide who streamed and shared him into sudden fame. Half a decade later, he's aging toward the avuncular: twenty-three and scruffier in frame, he raps astutely about employing his friends and saving funds for his progeny on this summer's "100 Grandkids." His Terminal 5 billing suggests a growing, and fitting, sense of responsibility: Miller invited greener, underrated names like **EarthGang** and **Michael Christmas** to open the evening, an apt use of his glow. (610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Dec. 16.)

1-800-Dinosaur

"And in the naked light I saw / ten thousand people, maybe more," James Blake sang, this October, on London's BBC 1, where he enjoys a residency as a member of this Brixton music collective. "People talking without speaking / people hearing without listening." Blake's cover of Simon and Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence," dedicated to a friend who died on New Year's Eve, encapsulates how frigid the electronic producer and singer-songwriter



The Pittsburgh native Mac Miller has taken many forms in his short rap career: frat hero, MTV bachelor, tortured recluse, savvy eccentric. He'll display all of these shades and more at Terminal 5, on Dec. 16.

can make dance floors feel: his own work is all deep-end thump and cerulean melodies, and his d.j. sets with Klaus, Airhead, and others bridge dance music's more frowzy corners with urgent R. & B. The group will play from open to close at this Williamsburg complex. (Output, 74 Wythe Ave, Brooklyn. outputclub.com. Dec. 19.)

The Sway Machinery

Jeremiah Lockwood, the founder and driving force of this upbeat sextet, grew up with two disparate musical mentors. As a boy, Lockwood sang in the choir of his grandfather, Jacob Konigsberg, a renowned cantor who led the High Holidays services at the Loop Synagogue, in Chicago, for several decades. When he was fourteen, Lockwood began a lifelong apprenticeship with the legendary Piedmont blues master guitarist Carolina Slim, which mainly consisted of busking alongside the impeccably dressed Slim in Manhattan subway stations. These influences, as well as a month-long sojourn to Mali a few years back, helped to shape Lockwood's sound, which often features Aramaic lyrics, Afro-beat-tinged horn lines, and a blues patina. The group's affecting new EP, "You Will Love No One but Me," strays a bit from its previous output, with more pop-oriented songs delivered in English, but the sound remains defined by the potent grooves of the drummer John Bollinger. (The Knitting Factory, 361 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn. 347-529-6696. Dec. 16.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Kenny Barron

"The Art of Conversation," one of last year's best jazz recordings, spotlighted the inspired partnership between two eminent jazz figures, the bassist Dave

Holland and the pianist Barron, a formidable figure since his emergence, in the sixties, and a prime example of early promise turned golden through experience. He leads a quintet anchored by the outstanding rhythm team of **Kiyoshi Kitagawa**, on bass, and **Jonathan Blake**, on drums. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Dec. 22-27.)

Cameron Brown

A musician's musician par excellence, the bassist Brown has expertly navigated the waters of jazz, from its bebop to its avant-garde shores, for the past five decades. He celebrates his seventieth birthday in the company of such illustrious compatriots as **Sheila Jordan**, **Jane Ira Bloom**, and **Don Byron**. (Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. Dec. 17-19.)

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra: Big Band Holidays

Although the orchestra's new "Big Band Holidays" album features some heavy-hitting vocalists, including Cécile McLorin Salvant, the ensemble's seasonal concert this year welcomes the worthy up-and-coming singers **Denzal Sinclair** and **Audrey Shafir**. Expect fervent swing and good spirits aplenty. (Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Dec. 17-19.)

Steve Nelson Trio

Nelson, standing on the shoulders of such modern masters as Gary Burton and Bobby Hutcherson, has reasserted the role of the vibraphone in jazz through rousing work with Dave Holland and others. His compact trio features the pianist **Rick Germanson** and the veteran bassist **Calvin Hill**. (Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. Dec. 25-26.)

DANCE

New York City Ballet / "The Nutcracker"

Once again, Marie will save the day with her little white slipper, the tree will grow through the roof, and the wooden nutcracker will magically transform into a valiant, albeit miniature, prince. Together, the two will travel to the land of sweets, where they will be regaled with an assortment of dances, under the benevolent eye of the Sugarplum Fairy. The George Balanchine production, which made this ballet popular in the U.S. more than sixty years ago, offers a well-calibrated mix of charm, grandeur, and real, undiluted dancing. It's also a great place to see promising young dancers cut their teeth on their first big roles. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Dec. 16-24 and Dec. 26-29. Through Jan. 3.)

Mark Morris Dance Group / "The Hard Nut"

In 1991, Mark Morris created a "Nutcracker" that was as brash and American as he could make it. The production, whose designs are inspired by the comics of Charles Burns, opens at a suburban mid-century Christmas party. A Yule log crackles on the TV set, the guests' dances are pure "Soul Train," and everybody drinks way too much punch. (There's a bit of hanky-panky as well.) Then, after a battle between an army of G.I. Joes and mechanized rats, things get weird. Morris draws on the original Hoffman version of the "Nutcracker" story, which is darker, and stranger, than the one we're used to. But, worry not, all's well in the end. The production returns to BAM, after an absence of several years, with a cast that features many veterans, including Morris himself, as Dr. Stahlbaum; John Heginbotham, as his sweet and rather befuddled consort; and Craig Patterson, as the sassy French maid. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 16-20.)

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

Amid the rotating repertoire of the third and fourth weeks of the City

Center season come opportunities (on Dec. 17, 19, 22, and 26) to catch up with this year's new works: Ronald K. Brown's "Open Door," Kyle Abraham's "Untitled America: First Movement," and "Awakening," the first piece that Robert Battle has choreographed for the troupe since becoming its artistic director, in 2011. In several programs devoted to the choreography of the company's founder (Dec. 16, 19, and 20), the Brawner Brothers band brings the gutbucket sounds of "Blues Suite" to vibrant life. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 16-20, Dec. 22-24, Dec. 26-27, and Dec. 29. Through Jan. 3.)

Noche Flamenca / "Antigona"

Soledad Barrio, the star of this New York-based flamenco troupe, takes the role of Sophocles' Antigone, in an adaptation by her husband, Martin Santangelo, which turns the Greek drama into a kind of flamenco opera. (West Park Presbyterian Church, 165 W. 86th St. 212-868-4444. Dec. 16-19, Dec. 21-23, Dec. 26, and Dec. 28-29. Through Jan. 23.)

"Dancing Korea"

This mini-festival of Korean dance, featuring eight companies in mix-and-

match groupings of three or four each day, juxtaposes the traditional with the contemporary, the shamanistic with the up-to-date. "I Go," a spare trio by the troupe Goblin Party, is among the more modern-looking selections, but it is a poetically melancholic meditation on the most time-worn of subjects: death. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 18-20.)

American Dance Machine for the 21st Century

When musicals are revived on Broadway, the original choreography is often dumped. People think of these dances as expendable, even though they're often the best part of the show. Since 2012, this initiative has worked to create a "living archive" of Broadway dance numbers, bringing in former cast members (including Robert LaFosse and Gemze de Lappe) to teach the steps and top-notch dancers from all over town to perform them. This year's lineup includes selections from "Singin' in the Rain" and "West Side Story," as well as the dream ballet from "Oklahoma!" (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 21-24, Dec. 26-27, and Dec. 29. Through Jan. 3.)

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X MOVIES



In the 1953 melodrama "All I Desire," Barbara Stanwyck plays an actress who returns to her home town.

STEP RIGHT UP

The rowdy American acting tradition, as seen by Douglas Sirk.

A DECADE INTO HIS HOLLYWOOD CAREER, the German émigré director Douglas Sirk—the subject of a rarity-filled retrospective at the Film Society of Lincoln Center, Dec. 23-Jan. 6—became a master of Americana. In 1953, Sirk delivered a trio of historical films that offer a big-hearted, furiously energetic, and somberly ironic view of his adopted country. All three are about motherless children and surrogate families; their protagonists are itinerant performers who challenge local moralizers and come off as the young nation's hidden source of progressive thought and social cohesion.

In the comedy "Meet Me at the Fair" (Jan. 4), Dan Dailey stars as Doc Tilbee, who travels the country in his caravan along with his associate and friend, Enoch Jones (Scatman Crothers, in his first major movie role). They hawk Doc's homemade high-proof tonic with flamboyant showmanship—Enoch is a gifted comic singer in the style of Fats Waller, and Doc is a raconteur who tells tall tales (shown in antic faux flashbacks). Upon picking up an injured runaway boy, Tad Bayliss (Chet Allen), Doc and Enoch become targets of the law: the hellish orphanage from which Tad fled is the object of political patronage during a local election.

The wandering artists meet an ardent young reformer, Zerelda Wing (Diana Lynn), whose philanthropy has been hijacked by corrupt officials. Sirk depicts the brazen ploys of the colorful rascals with a sardonic glee and looks admiringly at the freewheeling tumult of electoral campaigns. Doc turns theatrical performance into a journalistic tool; he's a defrocked intellectual who keeps his high culture to himself, only to flash it like a trick card—as did Sirk, a former student of philosophy and art history, who lends the tale a deft Shakespearean flourish.

"Take Me to Town" (Dec. 31), a Western, begins with an act of violent revolt, as a prisoner, Mae

Madison (Ann Sheridan), escapes and flees to a distant outpost, where she resumes her song-and-dance career under the florid name of Vermillion O'Toole. Her theatre, owned by the brassy yet sentimental Rose (Lee Patrick), becomes the target of local moralists, led by the starched reformer Edna Stoffer (Phyllis Stanley), who is about to become stepmother to a trio of boys with plans of their own. Sirk's direction of the boys is among his loopiest comic inventions, but he uses the full Technicolor palette to display Vermillion and Rose in deep shadow and lurid streaks, conjuring vast depths of feeling and funds of wisdom arising from tawdry circumstances.

Sirk is famous for his melodramas, starting with his 1954 version of "Magnificent Obsession" (Dec. 24-25), which launched Rock Hudson into stardom. "All I Desire" (Dec. 31), starring Barbara Stanwyck, is among his very best. Stanwyck plays Naomi Murdoch, a vaudevillian who left her husband and young children in order to pursue her acting career. Summoned back to her native Wisconsin town by a daughter making her own stage debut, Naomi—the object of public hatred and the embodiment of intimate desires—unearths fault lines in the community and the family alike. Sirk's story of the agonizing struggles of a life in art suggests his own ambivalence about the world of movies—from which he retired, in 1959, at the height of his career.

—Richard Brody

NOW PLAYING

The Big Short

Years before the financial crisis of 2008, early rumblings are detected by Michael Burry (Christian Bale), whose investment skills are in sharp contrast to his social unease. Unlike most of his peers, he spies the cracks in the housing market and wagers that, before too long, it will all come tumbling down. Word of his gamble inspires a few more players to take the plunge, including a miserable hedge-fund manager (Steve Carell), a pair of greenhorns from out of town (John Magaro and Finn Wittrock), and our sly narrator (Ryan Gosling), who works at Deutsche Bank. These are just some of the unlovely figures who pace back and forth through Adam McKay's new film, based on the nonfiction book by Michael Lewis. The movie pops and fizzles with invention, and even takes time out, now and then, to educate—screaming to a halt and summoning a celebrity (Selena Gomez, say, or Margot Robbie) to steer us through the economic verbiage. Everything you always wanted to know about credit default swaps but were afraid to ask: it's all here. So winning are these tactics, and so cheerfully headlong is the mood, that we're hardly aware of rooting for a bunch of utter cynics who are poised to make tens of millions of dollars from the misfortunes of others.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/14/15.) (In wide release.)

Brooklyn

Eilis (Saoirse Ronan) lives in a small Irish town with her mother (Jane Brennan) and sister (Fiona Glascott). The time is the nineteen-fifties, and Eilis is leaving for America—not in any spirit of rebellion, since she is a mild and uncomplaining soul, but because the Church has organized the move. John Crowley's movie follows her across the sea and into a brave new world, yet her life in Brooklyn is as plain and regular as the one she knew at home. She works in a department store, lives in a respectable boarding house (the motherly landlady is played by Julie Walters), and falls for a local Italian plumber (Emory Cohen). Circumstances send her back to Ireland, and there she meets another young man (Domhnall Gleeson), who courts her with no less politeness than was shown by his counterpart in New York. But which should she choose? And why does that choice not feel like more of a wrench? Nick Hornby's screenplay is poised and acute, but, in adapting Colm Tóibín's novel, he is stuck with a dangerously undramatic tale, and Crowley's direction is sedate to a fault. While the leads, especially Cohen, acquit themselves with grace, the smaller performances stay with you—Eva Birthistle, as a brassy shipmate, and Jessica Paré, as Eilis's elegant boss.—*A.L.* (In limited release.)

Carol

One day in the nineteen-fifties, Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett), a wife and mother, is shopping for Christmas presents at a department store in Manhattan. She comes across a salesgirl, Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara), and they fall in love, right there. (How long has it been, you ask yourself, since a movie delivered a proper *coup de foudre*?) Todd Haynes's film then follows the women as they meet for lunch, hang out at Carol's home, embark on an aimless journey, and go to bed—conscious, all the while, of what they are risking, flouting, or leaving behind. Therese has a boyfriend (Jake Lacy), and Carol has a husband (Kyle Chandler) and a child, although the maternal instinct gets short dramatic shrift. That feels true to Patricia Highsmith, whose 1952 novel, "The Price of Salt," is the foundation of the film. The fine screenplay is by Phyllis Nagy, who drains away the sourness of the book; what

remains is a production of clean and frictionless beauty, down to the last, strokable inch of clothing and skin. Yet Haynes and his stars, for all their stylish restraint, know that elegance alone will not suffice. Inside the showcase is a storm of feeling. With Sarah Paulson, as Carol's best friend.—*A.L.* (11/23/15) (In limited release.)

Celine and Julie Go Boating

Jacques Rivette's fable-like 1974 comedy refracts experience through illusion to ponder the very essence of cinematic imagination. Celine (Juliet Berto), a cabaret magician and a mythomaniac, moves in with Julie (Dominique Labourier), a lonely librarian studying magic, then edges into her private life and joins her on a series of quasi-psychedelic trips through the city and the mind. An abandoned mansion reveals Julie's early life in the form of a gothic mystery, and psychotropic lozenges insert the pair into a glossy movie melodrama (starring Bulle Ogier and Marie-France Pisier). The loosely guided performances are often slack, and the thin depiction of daily life lessens the power of fantasy, yet Rivette's fretful view of the dangers of stories is, in effect, a self-portrait as a cinephile on the verge of hallucination. The two women's lust for real-world companionship, their need for vicarious heroism, and their trip through the labyrinths of repressed memories come across as the director's job description. In French.—*Richard Brody* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Dec. 19 and Dec. 21.)

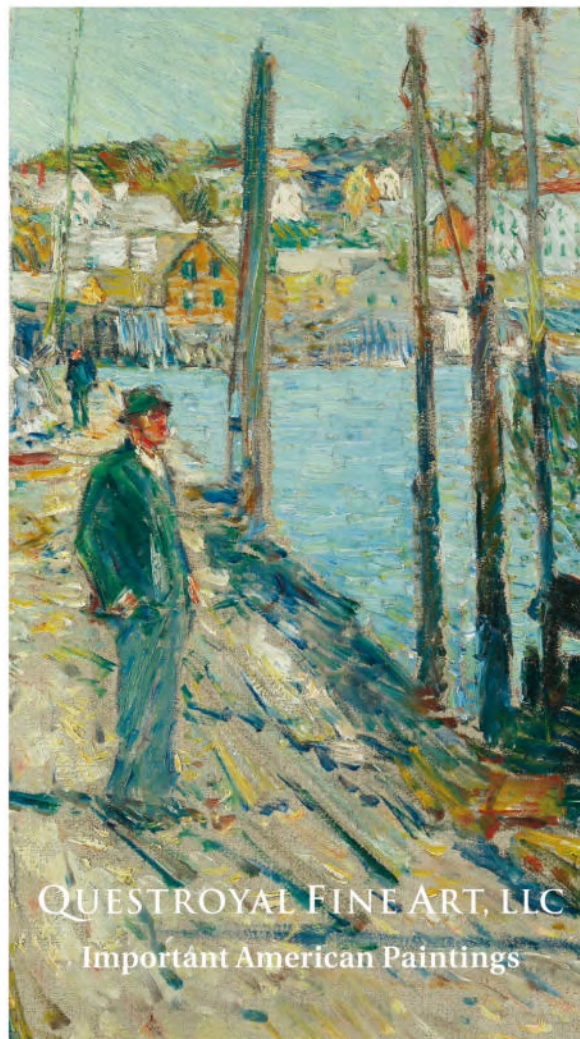
Chi-Raq

The new Spike Lee film, reaching boldly back across the millennia, finds inspiration in Aristotle's

phases. Lysistrata (Teyonah Parris) is the modern counterpart of her namesake in ancient Athens. Lee's heroine is protesting the gang violence of modern Chicago and the ubiquity of firearms, whereas the Greek one sought to end the war with Sparta, but their method is the same: a show of defiance and denial, gathering the womenfolk together and refusing to have sex with the men. It's a spirited conceit, and the cause could scarcely be more urgent, yet the resulting film never quite lands the punches that you hope for. The rhetoric is thunderous enough, and John Cusack holds nothing back in his role as a neighborhood preacher, using the funeral of an innocent youngster, caught in the crossfire, to inveigh against the ethnic prejudice and the economic hardship that stoked the crisis. But the movie wanders as much as it inflames, and you end up feeling not so much persuaded as hectored; as for the dialogue, rendered largely in verse, it stumbles as often as it flows. Still, there are joys to be had along the way, not least from Samuel L. Jackson, who assumes the role of the chorus, and who brings us bad news with his customary panache.—*A.L.* (12/14/15) (In wide release.)

Creed

This stirring, heartfelt, rough-grained reboot of the "Rocky" series is the brainchild of Ryan Coogler, who directed, wrote the story, and co-wrote the script with Aaron Covington. It starts in a juvenile-detention center in Los Angeles, where young Adonis Johnson is confined. He's soon adopted by Mary Anne Creed (Phylicia Rashad), Apollo's widow, who informs him that the boxer (who died before Adonis's



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birth) was his father. As an adult, Adonis (played with focussed heat by Michael B. Jordan) pursues a boxing career, moving to Philadelphia to be trained by Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone), his father's rival. The burly backstory doesn't stall the drama but provides its fuel. Coogler—aided by the cinematographer Maryse Alberti's urgent long takes—links the physical sacrifices of boxing and acting alike. Adonis also finds romance with the rising singer Bianca (Tessa Thompson), who has physical struggles of her own. Coogler ingeniously inverts the myth of bootstrap-tugging exertions: without family and connections, the new star of the boxing ring wouldn't stand a fighting chance.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

The Danish Girl

A welcome return to the smaller scale for the director Tom Hooper, who seems more at home with the intimacy of "The King's Speech" than with the sprawl of "Les Misérables." This movie, based on historical events, is set in the nineteen-twenties. Eddie Redmayne, deploying the full arsenal of his charm, plays Einar Wegener, who is himself invested, and then engulfed, in the act of performance. With the aid of makeup, expert mimicry, a

wig, and a range of elegant dresses, he enters society in the guise of Lili Elbe, supposedly the cousin of his wife, Gerda (Alicia Vikander). Yet this deception proves insufficient, and the story, which begins in Copenhagen and moves to Paris, concludes in Dresden, with transgender surgery. Not that we witness, or learn much about, the pains of that procedure; in line with the ruthlessly good taste that governs the whole film, it is the ineffable pallor of Redmayne's face that bears the burden of the agony. The skill with which the film negotiates the pitfalls of the theme could not be bettered. Does that very surfeit of propriety, however, not risk smothering the life of the drama? With Matthias Schoenaerts, as Einar's boyhood crush, now an art dealer, and Sebastian Koch, as the surgical pioneer.—*A.L.* (11/30/15) (In limited release.)

Don Verdean

No one is spared the righteous comic wrath of the director Jared Hess, in this wild satire about the exploitation of Christian faith by Christians and others. The title character (played by Sam Rockwell) is an archeologist whose illegal excavations in Israel are meant to prove the historical truth of

the Bible; he displays his findings and sells his books in American churches. With his business failing, Don seeks a spectacular treasure. Aided by his unscrupulous Israeli Jewish handler, Boaz (Jemaine Clement), he returns to the United States and pulls off a huge hoax, which sucks the two men deep into a web of crime. The loopy, comic complications involve a mercantile preacher (Danny McBride), his ex-Satanist competitor (Will Forte), and Don's steadfast assistant (Amy Ryan). Everyone betrays the faith—whether with greed or with science—and the slippery slope of worldly religion is subjected to a radical Kierkegaardian purge. But, tellingly, no one comes off as beyond redemption except Boaz, who sinks ever further into a bog of depravity. Boaz isn't merely a Jewish villain; his villainy is his Judaism. The caricature, though deployed in the service of a sacred cause, is nonetheless repellent.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Joy

Painful personal overtones resonate in David O. Russell's boisterous comic view—based on a true story—of an entrepreneur's conflict-riddled rise to success. Jennifer Lawrence stars as a divorced young mother on Long

Island who's in a rut. Smart, creative, and handy, she works at an airport counter and copes with her divorced parents (Virginia Madsen and Robert De Niro), her father's new girlfriend (Isabella Rossellini), her bitter half-sister (Elisabeth Röhm), her ex-husband (Édgar Ramírez), and her supportive but ailing grandmother (Diane Ladd). Overwhelmed by a Cinderella-like burden of chores, Joy designs a new kind of mop, finds an investor, and is thrust into the predatory world of attorneys and executives. Russell, who wrote the script and co-wrote the story with Annie Mumolo, captures the magical moment when Joy's private inspiration finds public expression; the movie's best scene features Bradley Cooper, as a TV executive who shows Joy the ropes. The core of the film is Joy's mastery of the killer instinct, her deft plotting of bold confrontations. But Russell's portrait of Joy is mainly a public one, stinting on intimacy in favor of the business-school case study. With Dascha Polanco, as Joy's best friend and savior.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Macbeth

The Scottish play bewitches once again; Justin Kurzel is hardly the first movie director to be lured into

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its mists. This new adaptation stars Michael Fassbender, at his moodiest and most hard-bitten, as the title character, with Marion Cotillard as his wife. The film begins and ends on the battlefield, as if that were Macbeth's natural hunting ground; everything in between has the quality of a bad and agonizing dream. (Could Lady Macbeth, perhaps, be sleepwalking through the whole thing?) King Duncan (David Thewlis) is knifed not in a castle but in a tent, and Shakespeare's verse is muttered, spat, and moaned without a gleam of rhetorical flourish. Nothing, in short, speaks of grandeur in this depleted land, and there's something crazed, and almost ridiculous, about fighting and killing for the chance to govern it. Fassbender seems more at ease with a blade in his hand than with a mouthful of poetry, while Sean Harris makes a vehement Macduff. Kurzel adds children throughout, to great effect: one to the trio of witches, and one—a corpse—to the opening scene, lamented by Macbeth. The movie brims, quite rightly, with blood and flame; the screen, by the close, is a terrible sea of red.—*A.L.* (12/7/15) (In limited release.)

Spotlight

There are many ways in which the new Tom McCarthy film could have gone wrong. The subject could hardly

be thornier: the uncovering, by an investigative team at the Boston *Globe*, of widespread sexual abuse by Catholic priests. The victims were children, but we meet them as adults, when they tell their stories. The movie, scripted by McCarthy and Josh Singer, resists any temptation to reconstruct the original crimes, and the sole focus is on the progress of the journalistic task. The result is restrained but never dull, and, barring a couple of overheated moments, when a character shouts in closeup, we don't feel harried or hectored. The film becomes a study in togetherness, both bad and fruitful; on one hand, we get the creepy sense of a community closing ranks, while on the other there is the old-school pleasure of watching an ensemble in full spate. The reporters are played by Michael Keaton, Brian d'Arcy James, Mark Ruffalo, and Rachel McAdams; their superiors, by John Slattery and Liev Schreiber; and the lawyers, by Billy Crudup and Stanley Tucci, who, as usual, calmly pockets every scene in which he appears.—*A.L.* (11/9/15) (In limited release.)

The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum

Kenji Mizoguchi's ample, angry drama, from 1939, is one of the cinema's great outpourings of

imaginative energy. It's set in the eighteen-eighties, in the world of Kabuki theatre, where Kikunosuke, a callow young actor, defies his family to marry Otoku, a servant who wants to help him refine his art. The disinherited Kikunosuke is determined to succeed on his own, but Mizoguchi—evoking the modern-day film business—depicts Kabuki impresarios as timid, the public as fickle. Only the steadfast Otoku can help Kikunosuke, and her agonized self-sacrifice is the core of the drama. The movie's quasi-operatic crescendo owes as much to Mizoguchi's exalted style as to his dramatic sense. In balletic long takes, he choreographs the actors in unison with the camera, which glides, pivots, and plunges to pursue the action to its emotional breaking point. His painterly framings have a teeming simplicity, entangling the characters in a web of conflicting forces. Tense and spectacular scenes of Kabuki performance are a thrilling tribute to its expressive power, as well as a revelation of the real-world pain—of women, offstage—that fuels it. Throughout his career, Mizoguchi depicted the moral crisis of Japan's subjugation of women; here, he raises it to the most exalted realms of tragedy.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Dec. 25-Jan. 7.)

Youth

Most of the new Paolo Sorrentino film is set in a peaceable spa, where Fred Ballinger (Michael Caine), a famous British composer, is taking it easy. He has largely given up work, whereas his old friend Mick Boyle (Harvey Keitel)—a movie director, trailed by a screenwriter and other hangers-on—is still entrapped in the coils of creative endeavor. Also present are Miss Universe (Madalina Diana Ghenea), a discontented film star (Paul Dano), and a lackey from Buckingham Palace who begs Fred to fulfill a royal request. Sorrentino circles these various figures with his usual suavity, compiling a collective meditation on the woes of old age and the frustrations of art. (If his last movie, "The Great Beauty," bowed to "La Dolce Vita," the tribute paid here to "8 1/2" is more flagrant still.) The result feels both sumptuous and aimless, as if we were leafing idly through an album of delectable sights—of sounds, too, as when Fred gathers the natural noises of a valley into a tone poem of his own imagining. Three women lend the film fire: Rachel Weisz, as Fred's grievance-driven daughter; Jane Fonda, as an indestructible diva; and Paloma Faith, as a pop star in a funny pastiche of a music video—the energetic hot spot of the film.—*A.L.* (12/7/15) (In limited release.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

Good Riddance Day

Look around your apartment, dig through your desk, flip through your wallet—it shouldn't take too long to find a physical relic of 2015 you'd like to leave behind. In a truly cunning instance of self-promotion, the information-destruction servicer Shred-It is offering New Yorkers the chance to purge their unwelcome artifacts before the ball drops by handing them over to be permanently and securely shredded in the middle of Times Square. The remains will be recycled, unlike the *año viejos* dummies of Latin America, whose annual stuffing and burning are the inspiration for this event. (Broadway Plaza, between 46th and 47th Sts. timessquarenyc.org. Dec. 28 at noon.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The auction houses close out the season with a medley of sales. **Sotheby's** kicks off with an offering of design objects on Dec. 16,

including a group of chic early-twentieth-century French pieces by Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, Alberto and Diego Giacometti, and Jean-Michel Frank. This is followed by a sale of jewel-like Tiffany lamps and vases later the same day; Israeli artworks, including naïf paintings by Reuven Rubin and abstractions by Mordecai Ardon, go under the gavel on Dec. 17. A Judaica sale on Dec. 22 is devoted to books and manuscripts from the Valmadonna Trust Library, the property of a London diamond dealer; among other prize lots, it includes the first complete printed edition of the Talmud, published in Venice in the early sixteenth century. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • **Christie's** devotes two days (Dec. 17-18) to the sale of design objects, with a session of Art Deco pieces and another filled with twentieth-century items—including a Ruhlmann desk and a fetching wall panel by Jean Dunand depicting a reclining female

nude—from a New York collection. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • **Phillips**, too, offers design pieces (Dec. 15), including a rather forbidding aluminum shower

stall fashioned by Le Corbusier for a dorm room at the Maison du Brésil, a residence hall for Brazilian students at the Cité Universitaire, in Paris. (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)

READINGS AND TALKS

McNally Jackson

This year's final installment of the bookstore's talks series will feature the playwright Annie Baker, the novelist Lynne Tillman, and the *T Magazine* editor Emily Stokes. Baker's 2015 play, "John," set during Christmastime and running more than three hours, serves as the evening's inspiration—the trio will read excerpts from the script, as well as from works by Nabokov, Von Kleist, and Rilke. (52 Prince St. 212-274-1160. Dec. 17 at 8.)

Zinc Bar

The Segue Poetry Series has hosted experimental readings at this Greenwich Village bar for twenty-five years, and still gathers together exciting young poets eager for a platform. Both the South London twenty-two-year-old Harry Burke and the New York-based twenty-seven-year-old Juliana Huxtable engage with the Internet, as a medium to utilize and a subject to be broached: the Serpentine curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist has praised Burke's avant-garde blend of visual art and poetry, much like Huxtable's all-caps screeds that explode across colorful inkjet canvases. Burke will read from his new book, "City of God," and Huxtable from her upcoming "Mucous in My Pineal Gland." (82 W. 3rd St. 212-477-9462. Dec. 19.)



FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB BAR GOTO

245 Eldridge St. (212-475-4411)

One recent blustery evening at this Lower East Side bar, a slight man in a white T-shirt came to the rescue of a woman battling a wind-jammed door—he ushered her in, pulled out a stool, and caressed the crease out of her menu. The man was Kenta Goto, who spent seven years buttoned up in vest and tie, shaking cocktails at the ritzy Pegu Club. Now in his own cozy, chic establishment, he attends to everything: he ferried *okonomiyaki*—savory pancakes stuffed with things like pork belly, octopus, or mushrooms—and other snacks to diners; as final drops of drink (Yuzu-Calpico Fizz, with fermented milk soda) after glorious drink (Sakura Martini, with gin, sake, maraschino liqueur, and a brined cherry blossom) vanished, there he was, tableside. A twenty-fifth-birthday party convened beneath a framed silk obi (Goto's grandmother's), and a friend of the celebrant noted, "You're literally not any different than you were yesterday." Goto's mother ran an *okonomiyaki* restaurant in Chiba. He moved to the States in 1997, when he was twenty-three, to attend the Fashion Institute. It took him two years to confess to his parents that he'd switched to bartending. They will visit in the spring, for his wedding, and see his hospitality philosophy—*omotenashi*—in action. He tried to define it: "Let's say that you have a birthday girl. Sure, you can buy her a round of tequila shots, but it'd be even nicer and more memorable if you gave her a small cake."

—Emma Allen



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OIJI

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SMALL PLATES, AND SMALL-BATCH SOJU, are what's on offer at Oiji, a new Korean restaurant in the East Village. The biggest of the small plates, in terms of food-world hype, are the hot honey-butter chips, a riff on a Korean craze from last year. They are wok-glazed, cayenne-spiced, and positioned, coyly, in a category of their own on the menu: in other words, you could have them as an appetizer or as a dessert, or, more likely, you will wind up doing both. The chips are the only anarchic touch in a dining experience that might otherwise have you longing for the chaos of Koreatown, on Thirty-second Street—as well as for the abundance and variety of *banchan*, the little dishes served alongside rice in more traditional Korean cuisine.

At Oiji, kimchi must be ordered separately. The focus is on precise, beautiful compositions of acid and fat, not on the fireworks of fermentation. *Chil-jeol-pan*, which is a deconstructed bibimbap, is described only as "seven flavors"; "trust us," the chefs, Brian Kim and Tae Kyung Ku, who were raised in Seoul, seem to be saying. The dish is a clock face of julienned vegetables, shredded beef, and egg. Delicate red and green rice crêpes, for wrapping makeshift tacos, sit in the center. The effect is stunning, and the flavors extremely delicate. The fried chicken might be the most subtle incarnation of its kind. Tapioca flour creates a lace-like skin on a dark chicken cutlet, and the filigreed surface is all the better for soaking up the gentle heat of a soy-based dipping sauce. There is no dousing of anything here; a mackerel filet, smoked in pine leaves, comes with a little brush for patting the fish with a citrus dressing. It looks like a broomstick in a doll's house.

Deep into the meaty part of the menu come the first truly bold flavors, as in the slow-cooked oxtail, which has a lingering sweetness, and no need for a knife. *Jang-jorim*, a soy-braised beef, is overshadowed by exquisitely buttery rice. There's a soft-boiled egg, too, but no gochujang, the spicy miso-and-red-chili paste that must surely be the world's cleverest condiment. In short, the food whispers, to varying effect, and so do the patrons, as the subdued end of the Beatles catalogue plays softly. The best dish is the most comforting: cold buckwheat noodles and preserved spring ramps, in a broth like silk which makes you almost forget that winter is coming.

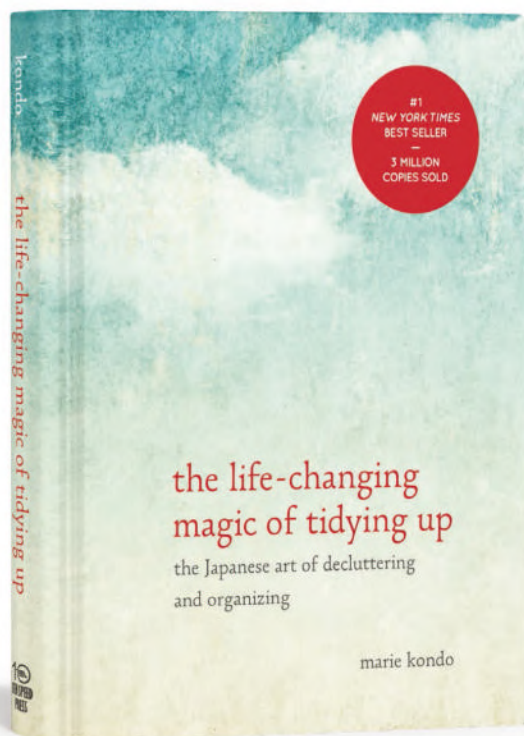
—Amelia Lester

Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Plates \$7-\$38.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES POMERANTZ

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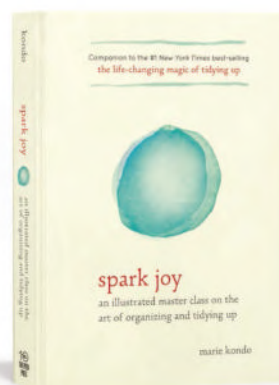
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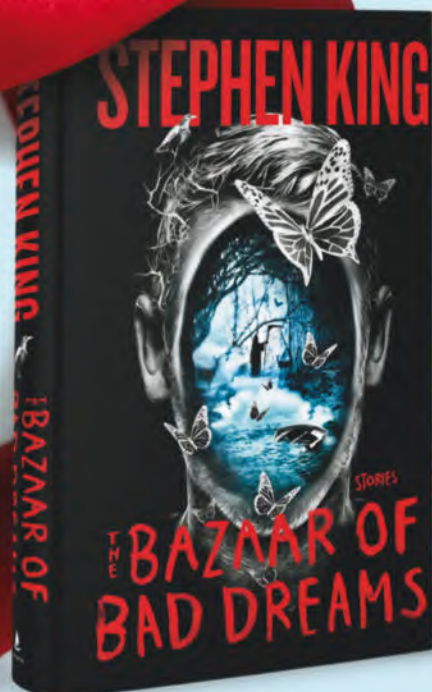
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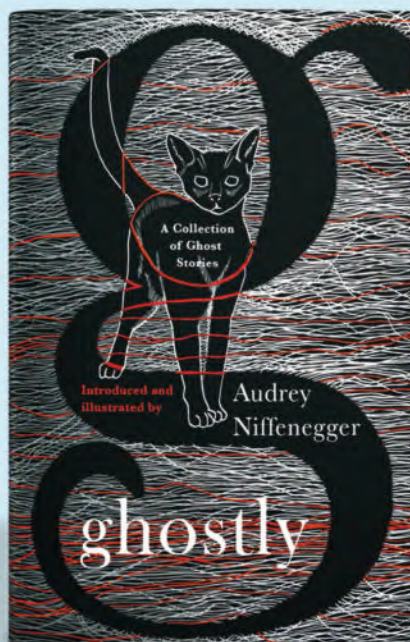
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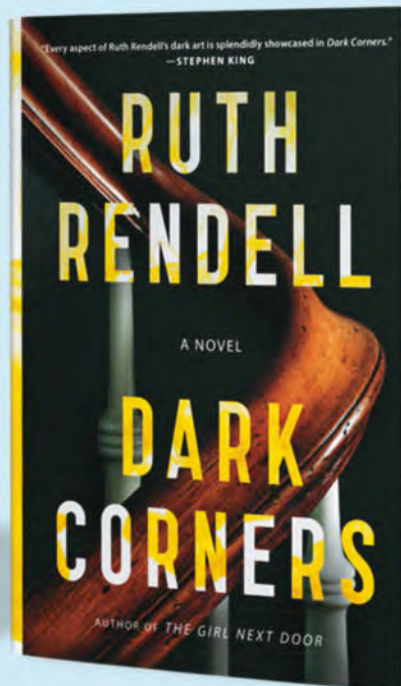
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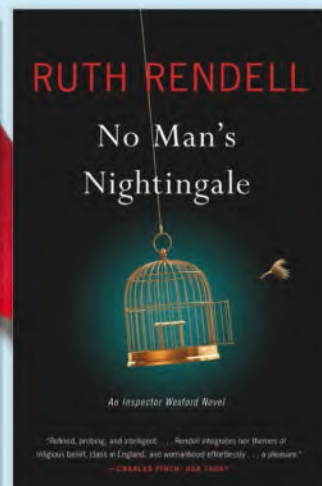
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

BAD COPS, GOOD COPS

In early November, 2014, Craig Futterman, a law professor at the University of Chicago, got a call from someone who worked in law enforcement in that city. The caller told Futterman about a squad-car dashboard-camera video from a few weeks earlier, which showed a police officer shooting to death a seventeen-year-old boy named Laquan McDonald. According to the source, the video was at striking odds with the version of the incident that the Chicago Police Department had presented. In that account, the officer, Jason Van Dyke, acted in self-defense: McDonald was out of control and menacing him with a knife, so he shot him once, in the chest. But the source, describing the video frame by frame, evoked what sounded to Futterman like “an execution.”

Fifteen years ago, Futterman founded a legal clinic at the university focussed on civil rights and police accountability. He and his frequent collaborator, Jamie Kalven, who runs a nonprofit journalism project called the Invisible Institute, interviewed witnesses, and they corroborated what the caller had said. Last December, Futterman and Kalven called on the C.P.D. to release the video. Soon afterward, Kalven, through a Freedom of Information Act request, obtained the autopsy report. It showed that McDonald, a ward of the state who had “Good Son” tattooed on one hand, had been shot sixteen times.

For months, the C.P.D. refused to release the video. There were protests. Then, last summer, Brandon Smith, a freelance journalist, sued the department to make the footage public, and a judge ruled in his favor. On November 24th, the day Officer Van Dyke was charged with first-degree murder, and thirteen months after the shooting, the police department finally released the video. It shows McDonald trotting briskly away from officers as they approach, not menacing them. When Van Dyke’s first shots hit him, he spins and drops to the ground. An officer kicks a

knife away. No one is seen offering first aid. Last week, the Justice Department announced that it is opening a wide-ranging investigation into the policies and practices of the Chicago police. Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who resisted making the video public, and who criticized the Justice Department investigation as “misguided,” said last Wednesday that he now welcomes it, and apologized for McDonald’s death.

This is not the first time that Futterman has received an inside tip about police abuse. He believes that the whistleblowers represent “the majority of Chicago cops,” who are doing their jobs “just as you would want them to.” Those officers “hate this stuff” as much as anyone, because “it creates hostility to the police, and steals the honor of those who are doing things right.” Yet even the best-intentioned officers have to cope with a code of silence—the mirror image of the criminals’ code against snitching.

In the McDonald case, the first officers on the scene, responding to a call about a young man acting erratically and breaking into trucks, were doing things right. McDonald apparently did have a knife, and, according to the autopsy, he had PCP in his system. Futterman said that those officers were careful. They “needed to arrest him, take him to the

hospital,” and “they called for backup, for someone with a taser.” Then Van Dyke arrived and instantly fired sixteen shots. In reports to internal investigators, the other officers either corroborated his story or said that they hadn’t seen what happened. One said that she had been looking down and missed the whole thing.

The code of silence has protected some particularly reprehensible behavior in the C.P.D., much of it directed at the city’s black population. Perhaps the most egregious was that of Jon Burge, a commander who, in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, headed a group of officers that he called the Midnight Crew. To extract confessions, the crew tortured dozens of men, most of them African-American, using



electric shock, suffocation, and Russian roulette. Last May, the city agreed to a reparations agreement that included \$5.5 million for the victims and an obligation to teach the episode in the public-school curriculum. According to the Better Government Association, between 2010 and 2014 there were seventy fatal shootings by the Chicago police, a higher number than in any other large city. (Phoenix, Philadelphia, and Dallas had a higher number per capita.) Between 2004 and 2014, the city spent \$521 million defending the department and settling lawsuits claiming excessive force.

Last March, after a seven-year legal battle, waged by Futterman, Kalven, and two Chicago law firms—Loevy & Loevy and the People's Law Office—to obtain records of police officers who had accumulated repeated citizen complaints, an Illinois appeals-court judge ordered the records released. They show that, of nearly twenty-nine thousand allegations of misconduct filed between 2011 and 2015, only two per cent resulted in any discipline—and, of those which did, the vast majority took the form of reprimands or suspensions of less than a week. Moreover, while African-Americans filed most of the complaints, those lodged by whites were more likely to be upheld.

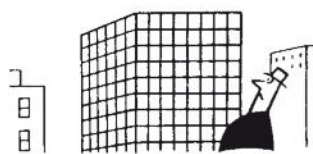
Emanuel's belated apology and the Justice Department

investigation represent progress, but the real hope is for an end to the code of silence. Officers who come forward have to be able to do so without fear of losing their jobs, or worse—in 2011, a cop named Jerome Finnigan pleaded guilty to plotting to kill a fellow-officer who he suspected would testify against him. Lifting that fear will require the department and the city to first accept the transparency that they have often resisted.

Thanks to the efforts of Futterman and Kalven, among others, anyone can now search an online database called the Citizens Police Data Project. It shows that, before Finnigan and Van Dyke were charged with serious crimes, there were sixty-eight complaints against Finnigan and eighteen against Van Dyke. (Neither was disciplined.) Meanwhile, the Fraternal Order of Police has sued to block the release of more data, citing a stipulation in its contract that calls for destroying any disciplinary records older than five years. Among the records are those of some of Burge's crew; there are still torture cases pending against them. For the citizens of a community to trust the police, they have to know that they aren't being systematically lied to. It's a simple lesson that activists around the country have been reminding us of, but the Chicago police seem to have to learn it over and over again.

—Margaret Talbot

TRUPLANDIA POSTCARD RUBDOWN



Five times a day, devout Muslims perform *wudu*, a purification ritual. (From the Koran, Sura 5:6: "When you rise up to prayer, wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows, and wipe your heads and your feet to the ankles.") In Moroccan cities, the ritual is often performed at bathhouses called hammams. People with more upmarket tastes might visit "the first authentic luxury hammam in New York City," on the seventh floor of the Trump SoHo Hotel, on Spring Street. The hotel's spa offers facials, pedicures, and massages, but "the hammam is sort of what we're known for," an attendant said last week. "We've had several Middle Eastern guests tell us that ours is as good as the ones in Morocco."

The Spa at Trump SoHo announced recently that it would offer, for two hundred and thirty dollars, a special treat: the Moroccan Ritual, "a sixty-minute experience designed to leave guests drenched in head-to-toe hydration." A

press release said that the hammams were "inspired by Ivanka Trump's travels in Istanbul," which is not in Morocco. Four days later, Ivanka's father, Donald, unleashed an Islamophobic tirade that inspired J. K. Rowling to compare him unfavorably to Voldemort.

Rowling wasn't alone. Ibrahim Hooper, from the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said, "That's Donald Trump for you: he attacks something and profits from it at the same time. It's a good shtick if you can pull it off, I guess." Asked about the roots of the hammam tradition, a Trump Spa employee said, "It's an exfoliation treatment. A traditional Moroccan thing. It's not necessarily Muslim. I wouldn't know anything about that."

In search of clarification, one had to look elsewhere in the Trump universe. About seventy blocks uptown, wedged between West End Avenue and the West Side Highway, is a strip of landfill that might as well be called Trumplandia: it's home to seven mirrored high-rise apartment buildings facing the Hudson, each emblazoned with the words "TRUMP PLACE" in big gold or silver letters. Although the Trump Organization sold most of the properties years ago, the buildings still bear the Presidential candidate's name. A doorman named James,

wearing an overcoat monogrammed with "T.P.," for Trump Place, stood in front of one of them, at 120 Riverside Boulevard. "We used to say the name with pride, but now he's way out of line," he said. "Two hundred and seventy people live in this building—all kinds of backgrounds, and everyone gets along. For him to say awful things about Muslims, about Mexican people? Guys work here who are from Mexico, from Colombia. I can only imagine what they're saying among themselves." He went on, "Sometimes the kids ask me if I'm going to vote for him. I say, 'You know, I think Hillary is a better choice.'"

Some of the buildings' rear entrances are on a short stretch of new pavement called Freedom Place. At the southern end, at the New York Cat Hospital, a veterinarian said, "A lot of these apartments are owned by foreign businessmen. Perhaps, in foreign countries, it's believed that the Trump brand is a sign of class. Most New Yorkers would feel otherwise."

A block north, Trump Place banners hung outside a grocery store. Bibek Poudel, a nineteen-year-old wearing a beanie, works as a cashier there. A year ago, he came from Kathmandu on a student visa. "I heard something about this Trump," Poudel said. "He is wrong. Just because

Lester Holt
Paris



We go to the story
so you get the story.

 **NIGHTLY NEWS**
WITH LESTER HOLT

a few people are bad, you can't blame their religion for that."

Inside the Dwight Preschool, a teacher with a soul patch was alone in a classroom, blowing bubbles. "A lot of people will live in these Trump buildings and think nothing of it, and yet they'll consider themselves liberals," he said. "Is this even politics anymore? It's more like the movie 'Network.'" A taxi-driver from Syria, who was stopped at a red light, said, "Trump is a jerk. Low class." Did he care to elaborate? "Not worth my time."

"He runs a nice building, a luxurious building, and at my age I deserve it," a woman with a walker said as she stood outside 220 Riverside Boulevard. "If he wins, God bless him, and God help the American people." Nearby, an Israeli woman named Rivka said, "Because he's a rich guy, we call him eccentric. If he was poor, we would say—you know the word *meshuggener*?"

"Trump is not stupid," Alen Sabovic, a handyman, said. "He's a businessman." Sabovic moved from Montenegro nine years ago. "My kids are born here. I'm gonna be a citizen soon. I'm Muslim myself. I'm not very political, but this worries me, judging people based on religion. In my country, we haven't had that kind of problem since Milosevic. I just hope we don't keep going like this, because America is the greatest country in the world."

Around the corner from Trumplandia, at 1 Riverside Drive, is a five-story town house. In contrast to the shiny gold of Trump Place, its gables are painted green, the color associated with the Prophet Muhammad. This is the Islamic Cultural

Center, the oldest mosque in the city. As night fell, a man in a Yankees jacket entered the mosque. He took off his shoes, performed *wudu*, knelt, and began to pray.

—Andrew Marantz

MELTING POT DEPT. POST-CODE



"This is the most Kubrickian room," Lin-Manuel Miranda said the other night, sweeping into the seventh floor of the New Museum, on the Bowery. The room was long, very white, with two glass walls, facing south and east, and in a corner was a curved white leather couch, to which Miranda led his party. Miranda, the creator and star of "Hamilton" and "In the Heights," asked for coffee—very sweet, very light, *por favor*. He is a sleep-deprived new parent, and he was about to perform for the MacDowell Colony's Chairman's Evening, in the museum's basement theatre.

As he drank his coffee, Miranda showed, on his phone, a video of his baby son to the evening's host, the novelist Michael Chabon, and his wife, the writer Ayelet Waldman, who have four kids. Waldman asked about child care. Plenty of help from his parents and in-laws, Miranda said—the whole clan lives in Washington Heights, with his in-laws just three doors away. His wife is an attorney. "Let me send her my book

'Bad Mother,'" Waldman said. "It's—it's what it sounds like."

Just then, Martin Scorsese stepped out of a chartreuse-walled elevator. "That's a green-screen elevator!" he cracked. He was the evening's other headliner. Wearing a blue Battistoni suit, he seemed tickled to be in the neighborhood. "I grew up a block from here, on Elizabeth Street," he said. "Both of my parents were born there." He crossed the room with his wife, Helen, a former book editor, who is taller and less wound-up than he is, and greeted the Miranda group.

"Do you realize where we are?" Scorsese asked. "Sammy's Bowery Follies was right here. The Last of the Red Hot Mamas sang here. Dwarfs sang here. Once upon a time, a guy named Chuck Connors ran this area. They called him the mayor of Chinatown. He was popular with the cops, because he threw them big dinners, called 'rackets.' He'd bring tour buses in from uptown to phony opium dens." Miranda had his head cocked, listening. New York City history is one of his obsessions. Scorsese went on, "Wallace Beery played Connors in a film called 'The Bowery.' George Raft. Jackie Cooper. Beautiful film. Irish-knockabout style."

"Pre-Code?" Miranda asked.

"Pre-Code. Extremely frank about the racial dynamics. Starts with a shot of a saloon called Nigger Joe's, which was a real place, and goes downhill from there."

"No Latinos in the picture then, lucky for us."

Scorsese talked about Elizabeth Street. "It was a Sicilian village," he said. "Bob De Niro hung out a few blocks over. That was a Neapolitan village. A different world."

Somebody asked him if he remembered CBGB. "Are you kidding?" he said, laughing. "I'm talking about 1949. That was the seventies. By then, I was living in California."

He recently finished mixing a television pilot about the music business in the seventies. The series, "Vinyl," will debut in February, on HBO. "Nobody appreciates the impact of Carole King's 'Tapestry,' least of all Carole King," he said.

Scorsese is now editing a film, "Silence," based on a novel by Shusaku Endo, about Portuguese Jesuit priests



in seventeenth-century Japan. “We shot mostly in Taiwan, doubling for Kyushu, southern Japan,” he said. “We were up in the mountains. I don’t usually shoot that much landscape. It was very muddy. They gave me these big boots, which stuck in the mud. I couldn’t get to the actors. I’d step right out of the boots.”

Scorsese asked Miranda to explain the finer points of masculine politesse that, in turn-of-the-nineteenth-century New York, could lead to a duel like the one that ended in Alexander Hamilton’s death. Miranda broke it down for him—the escalating slights, the intolerable insult, the excruciating calculation of “satisfaction.” Duelling, he said, “was legal in New Jersey.” Then he added, “Kind of like pot is legal in Central Park.”

“I wanted to be a Hollywood stuntman when I grew up,” Miranda said. “But then I realized that I didn’t like to get hurt or go fast. So the only thing left was musical theatre.” He mentioned that he had worked on a recent “West Side Story” revival, writing Spanish versions of all the Puerto Rican characters’ lines and lyrics. The play was important to his own family’s history. “My dad saw the movie when he was young, in Puerto Rico, and when Tony was killed at the end he cried, of course. But other people in the theatre cheered, because they were for the Sharks, the Puerto Ricans. And that’s when my dad said, ‘This town is too small. I gotta get the fuck out of here.’ And he moved to New York.”

—William Finnegan

THE BOARDS FUTURE HISTORY



King Charles III,” which is currently playing at the Music Box Theatre, imagines the state of Britain and of the British monarchy shortly after the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The play, by the thirty-five-year-old British playwright Mike Bartlett, is rife with Shakespearean references: aptly billed as a “future history play” and written in blank verse, it features an unsteady monarch, a scheming Duchess, and an exhortatory ghost who sows familial discord.

What, then, might a Shakespeare scholar make of Bartlett’s effort? Enter James Shapiro—the Larry Miller Professor of English, at Columbia University, and the author of “The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606”—who was invited to attend a recent performance.

“My first impression was to consider what’s Shakespearean about it, and I started reading it the wrong way,” Shapiro, who had read the play earlier, confessed, as he advanced down the aisle. “I was scanning the lines to see whether they follow the same metrical rules as Shakespeare—the *ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump*. And that is not what this script is about. Yeah, it’s iambic pentameter—but it turned out to be Shakespearean in much more unexpected and hard-to-capture ways.” He looked at the *Playbill* cover—it features a picture of Charles with his mouth taped. “It is a great succession play,” he went on. “From the beginning of his career, up until ‘Hamlet,’ Shakespeare made a living writing succession plays. It’s tougher to do than you think. Especially with a play like ‘Richard III,’ where everybody knows how it ends, there have to be twists. With this play, you kind of know which way it is heading, but you can’t figure out how it’s going to get there.”

The house lights dimmed. There was Tim Piggott-Smith, a veteran of the Royal Shakespeare Company, as Charles, twisting his signet ring in emulation of royal habit, and soliloquizing—“My life has been a ling’ring for the throne”—in a voice more pleasingly mellifluous than the real Prince’s regal lockjaw. Shapiro snorted with laughter at some lines (“Shall I be Mother?” asks Charles, when pouring tea for his Prime Minister), and nodded at others, including a scene in which Richard Goulding as Prince Harry, disconsolate in his role as “a ginger joke,” encounters a kebab seller who compares the state of the nation to the shaved meat on his spit: “When does Britain get so cut down that it’s not Britain anymore?”

“There is always one speech about what England is—‘this scepter’d isle,’ in ‘Richard II’—where Shakespeare stops and tells you what this nation is about,” Shapiro said, during intermission. “I am seeing how deep the anxiety is, not just about the monarchy but about England, in this play. All the institutions are threatening to unravel. The other thing is that

Charles is going to be a *terrible* king. He reminds me a lot of King James, who followed the first Queen Elizabeth: really smart, waited forever to get the English Crown, and then was wrong-footed almost immediately.”

Act II: Lydia Wilson as the Duchess of Cambridge addressing her husband in Lady Macbeth mode (“You must then focus ‘pon the public eye/ You dress your best. And so, of course, shall I”); Parliament in lockdown; and an increasingly unmoored Charles, hair awry. At the play’s end, Shapiro, after applauding warmly, ascended to Piggott-Smith’s dressing room, where a dresser with



Tim Piggott-Smith

cold cream was cleansing the royal brow.

“Have you ever played Richard II? You just did,” Shapiro said.

“No, but I did a bit of Lear there, too,” Piggott-Smith replied. There were mutual congratulations—Shapiro signed a copy of “The Year of Lear,” a gift to Piggott-Smith from his wife on opening night. Shapiro asked whether the real Prince Charles had seen the play. No, though a palace spy seems to have attended a performance. “We received a note at the Almeida”—where the show originated, last year—“to the effect that Charles doesn’t wear his wedding ring.” Piggott-Smith added that he has met Charles only once, at the Royal Shakespeare Company. “He was very charming,” he said. “I found myself standing next to him, and there was a little break in the conversation. He leaned forward to me and said”—for the first time that evening, Piggott-Smith slipped into a precise impersonation of the future King of England—“‘Any work about?’”

—Rebecca Mead

THE FINANCIAL PAGE IN DEFENSE OF PHILANTHROCAPITALISM

When Mark Zuckerberg, the C.E.O. of Facebook, announced that he would be donating ninety-nine per cent of his Facebook stock to a new nonprofit organization, he got his share of positive headlines. But the move was also dismissed as a tax-avoidance scheme, a public-relations gambit, a way to boost Facebook's profits under the guise of doing good, and the latest expression of the "white savior industrial complex." The economist Thomas Piketty, the author of "Capital," said simply that the donation "looks like a big joke."

The backlash is no surprise. The sheer size of Zuckerberg's grant, currently valued at forty-five billion dollars, shows just how concentrated wealth has become, and the earnest rhetoric of his mission statement, couched as a public letter to his baby daughter, reinforced a sense of Silicon Valley's overweening confidence in its ability to fix the world. Hostility toward philanthropy is nothing new; when John D. Rockefeller established his eponymous foundation, he was attacked for reasserting "the old reign of aristocracy under the new names of philanthropy and science." And Zuckerberg's move comes at a time of anxiety about the rise of so-called philanthrocapitalism. Foundations have great influence over social policy but are independent of democratic control. Why should unelected billionaires get to exercise their neo-missionary impulses across the globe?

In an ideal world, big foundations might be superfluous. But in the real world they are vital, because they are adept at targeting problems that both the private sector and the government often neglect. The classic mission of nonprofits is investing in what economists call public goods—things that have benefits for everyone, even people who haven't paid for them. Public health is a prime example: we would all benefit from the eradication of malaria and tuberculosis (diseases that Bill Gates's foundation has spent billions fighting). But, since the benefits of public goods are widely enjoyed, it's hard to get anyone in particular to foot the bill.

Corporations almost invariably underinvest in public goods, because they can capture only a small fraction of the rewards. That's especially evident when the main beneficiaries are poor: out of more than fifteen hundred drugs that were approved for sale between 1975 and 2004, just twenty-one targeted tropical diseases or tuberculosis. Governments do better at providing public goods (defense, say, or education), but private agendas often derail the public interest, and governments are far less effective at tackling

global problems. As the economist William Nordhaus has written, there is "no mechanism by which global citizens can make binding collective decisions." Coöperation is always fragile and vulnerable to free riding. Think of how hard it's been for countries to reach agreement on reducing carbon emissions.

Projects like eradicating malaria or providing universal Internet access (one of Zuckerberg's ambitions) also require investment that may not produce results for decades to come. Politicians have to worry about being reelected every few years. And global problems are inherently distant from the life of the average voter. The U.S. government spends less on aid to the world's poor every year than Americans spend on candy. Even when the U.S. clearly bears much responsibility for a global problem, like climate change, it's hard to get Congress to pay up.

Philanthropies, by contrast, have far-reaching time horizons and almost no one they have to please. This can lead them to pour money into controversial causes, as Zuckerberg has with education reform. But it also enables them to make big bets on global public goods. There is a long history of this: the Rockefeller Foundation funded the research that produced a vaccine for yellow fever. The Gates Foundation, since its founding, in 2000, has put billions of dollars into global health programs, and now spends more on health issues than the W.H.O.

It's been suggested that if we just taxed billionaires more there'd be more money for promoting social projects globally. But it's far likelier that those projects would just go underfunded. Though in the past decade the U.S. sharply increased spending on fighting infectious diseases like malaria, it did so only after the Gates Foundation put them back on the global public-health agenda. All public-goods spending is precarious, especially foreign aid, and never more so than with Republicans in charge of Congress. In inflation-adjusted terms, the budget for the National Institutes of Health is lower now than it was a decade ago, and late last year Senator Lindsey Graham warned that budget pressures could put anti-malaria funding "at risk."

Yet philanthropic investment in global projects continues to increase. Anne Petersen, the president of the Global Philanthropy Alliance, told me, "American philanthropy used to be all about giving locally. But there's been a dramatic trend toward international giving, and that's only going to continue." It's reasonable to lament the fact that a small number of billionaires have so much power over which problems get dealt with and which do not. But they have that power precisely because they are spending so much of their money to solve global problems. We, as a country, are not.

—James Surowiecki



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THE SIEGE OF MIAMI

As temperatures climb, so, too, will sea levels.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

*In the Miami area, the daily high-water mark has been rising almost an inch a year.*

The city of Miami Beach floods on such a predictable basis that if, out of curiosity or sheer perversity, a person wants to she can plan a visit to coincide with an inundation. Knowing the tides would be high around the time of the “super blood moon,” in late September, I arranged to meet up with Hal Wanless, the chairman of the University of Miami’s geological-sciences department. Wanless, who is seventy-three, has spent nearly half a century studying how South Florida came into being. From this, he’s concluded that much of the region may have less than half a century more to go.

We had breakfast at a greasy spoon

not far from Wanless’s office, then set off across the MacArthur Causeway. (Out-of-towners often assume that Miami Beach is part of Miami, but it’s situated on a separate island, a few miles off the coast.) It was a hot, breathless day, with a brilliant blue sky. Wanless turned onto a side street, and soon we were confronting a pond-sized puddle. Water gushed down the road and into an underground garage. We stopped in front of a four-story apartment building, which was surrounded by a groomed lawn. Water seemed to be bubbling out of the turf. Wanless took off his shoes and socks and pulled on a pair of polypropylene booties. As he stepped out

of the car, a woman rushed over. She asked if he worked for the city. He said he did not, an answer that seemed to disappoint but not deter her. She gestured at a palm tree that was sticking out of the drowned grass.

“Look at our yard, at the landscaping,” she said. “That palm tree was super-expensive.” She went on, “It’s crazy—this is saltwater.”

“Welcome to rising sea levels,” Wanless told her.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, sea levels could rise by more than three feet by the end of this century. The United States Army Corps of Engineers projects that they could rise by as much as five feet; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicts up to six and a half feet. According to Wanless, all these projections are probably low. In his office, Wanless keeps a jar of meltwater he collected from the Greenland ice sheet. He likes to point out that there is plenty more where that came from.

“Many geologists, we’re looking at the possibility of a ten-to-thirty-foot range by the end of the century,” he told me.

We got back into the car. Driving with one hand, Wanless shot pictures out the window with the other. “Look at that,” he said. “Oh, my gosh!” We’d come to a neighborhood of multi-million-dollar homes where the water was creeping under the security gates and up the driveways. Porsches and Mercedeses sat flooded up to their chassis.

“This is today, you know,” Wanless said. “This isn’t with two feet of sea-level rise.” He wanted to get better photos, and pulled over onto another side street. He handed me the camera so that I could take a picture of him standing in the middle of the submerged road. Wanless stretched out his arms, like a magician who’d just conjured a rabbit. Some workmen came bouncing along in the back of a pickup. Every few feet, they stuck a depth gauge into the water. A truck from the Miami Beach Public Works Department pulled up. The driver asked if we had called City Hall. Apparently, one of the residents of the street had mistaken the high tide for a water-main break. As we were

chatting with him, an elderly woman leaning on a walker rounded the corner. She looked at the lake the street had become and wailed, "What am I supposed to do?" The men in the pickup truck agreed to take her home. They folded up her walker and hoisted her into the cab.

To cope with its recurrent flooding, Miami Beach has already spent something like a hundred million dollars. It is planning on spending several hundred million more. Such efforts are, in Wanless's view, so much money down the drain. Sooner or later—and probably sooner—the city will have too much water to deal with. Even before that happens, Wanless believes, insurers will stop selling policies on the luxury condos that line Biscayne Bay. Banks will stop writing mortgages.

"If we don't plan for this," he told me, once we were in the car again, driving toward the Fontainebleau hotel, "these are the new Okies." I tried to imagine Ma and Pa Joad heading north, their golf bags and espresso machine strapped to the Range Rover.

The amount of water on the planet is fixed (and has been for billions of years). Its distribution, however, is subject to all sorts of rearrangements. In the coldest part of the last ice age, about twenty thousand years ago, so much water was tied up in ice sheets that sea levels were almost four hundred feet lower than they are today. At that point, Miami Beach, instead of being an island, was fifteen miles from the Atlantic Coast. Sarasota was a hundred miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico, and the outline of the Sunshine State looked less like a skinny finger than like a plump heel.

As the ice age ended and the planet warmed, the world's coastlines assumed their present configuration. There's a good deal of evidence—much of it now submerged—that this process did not take place slowly and steadily but, rather, in fits and starts. Beginning around 12,500 B.C., during an event known as meltwater pulse 1A, sea levels rose by roughly fifty feet in three or four centuries, a rate of more than a foot per decade. Meltwater pulse 1A, along with pulses 1B, 1C, and 1D, was,

most probably, the result of ice-sheet collapse. One after another, the enormous glaciers disintegrated and dumped their contents into the oceans. It's been speculated—though the evidence is sketchy—that a sudden flooding of the Black Sea toward the end of meltwater pulse 1C, around seventy-five hundred years ago, inspired the deluge story in Genesis.

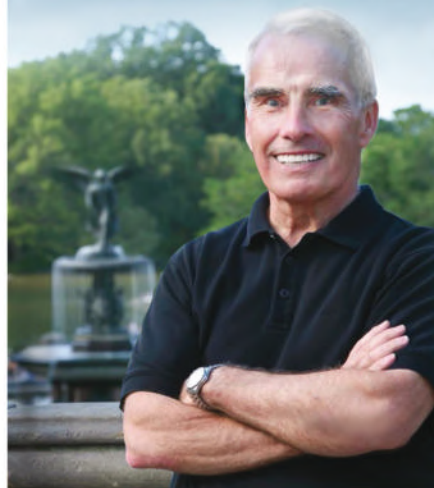
As temperatures climb again, so, too, will sea levels. One reason for this is that water, as it heats up, expands. The process of thermal expansion follows well-known physical laws, and its impact is relatively easy to calculate. It is more difficult to predict how the earth's remaining ice sheets will behave, and this difficulty accounts for the wide range in projections.

Low-end forecasts, like the I.P.C.C.'s, assume that the contribution from the ice sheets will remain relatively stable through the end of the century. High-end projections, like NOAA's, assume that ice-melt will accelerate as the earth warms (as, under any remotely plausible scenario, the planet will continue to do at least through the end of this century, and probably beyond). Recent observations, meanwhile, tend to support the most worrisome scenarios.

The latest data from the Arctic, gathered by a pair of exquisitely sensitive satellites, show that in the past decade Greenland has been losing more ice each year. In August, NASA announced that, to supplement the satellites, it was launching a new monitoring program called—provocatively—Oceans Melting Greenland, or O.M.G. In November, researchers reported that, owing to the loss of an ice shelf off northeastern Greenland, a new "floodgate" on the ice sheet had opened. All told, Greenland's ice holds enough water to raise global sea levels by twenty feet.

At the opposite end of the earth, two groups of researchers—one from NASA's Jet Propulsion Lab and the other from the University of Washington—concluded last year that a segment of the West Antarctic ice sheet has gone into "irreversible decline." The segment, known as the Amundsen Sea sector, contains enough water to raise global sea levels by four feet, and its melting could destabilize other parts of the ice

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sheet, which hold enough ice to add ten more feet. While the “decline” could take centuries, it’s also possible that it could be accomplished a lot sooner. NASA is already planning for the day when parts of the Kennedy Space Center, on Florida’s Cape Canaveral, will be underwater.

The day I toured Miami Beach with Hal Wanless, I also attended a panel discussion at the city’s Convention Center titled “Eyes on the Rise.” The discussion was hosted by the French government, as part of the lead-up to the climate convention in Paris, at that point two months away. Among the members of the panel was a French scientist named Eric Rignot, a professor at the University of California, Irvine. Rignot is one of the researchers on O.M.G., and in a conference call with reporters during the summer he said he was “in awe” of how fast the Greenland ice sheet was changing. I ran into him just as he was about to go onstage.

“I’m going to scare people out of this room,” he told me. His fellow-panelists were a French geophysicist, a climate scientist from the University of Miami, and Miami Beach’s mayor, Philip Levine. Levine was elected in 2013, after airing a commercial that tapped into voters’ frustration with the continual flooding. It showed him pre-

paring to paddle home from work in a kayak.

“Some people get swept into office,” Levine joked when it was his turn at the mike. “I always say I got floated in.” He described the steps his administration was taking to combat the effects of rising seas. These include installing enormous underground pumps that will suck water off the streets and dump it into Biscayne Bay. Six pumps have been completed, and fifty-four more are planned. “We had to raise people’s storm-water fees to be able to pay for the first hundred-million-dollar tranche,” Levine said. “So picture this: you get elected to office and the first thing you tell people is ‘By the way, I’m going to raise your rates.’”

He went on, “When you are doing this, there’s no textbooks, there’s no ‘How to Protect Your City from Sea Level Rise,’ go to Chapter 4.” So the city would have to write its own. “We have a team that’s going to get it done, that’s going to protect this city,” the Mayor said. “We can’t let investor confidence, resident confidence, confidence in our economy start to fall away.”

John Morales, the chief meteorologist at NBC’s South Florida affiliate, was moderating the discussion. He challenged the Mayor, offering a version of the argument I’d heard from Wanless—that today’s pumps will be submerged by the seas of tomorrow.

“Down the road, this is just a Band-Aid,” Morales said.

“I believe in human innovation,” Levine responded. “If, thirty or forty years ago, I’d told you that you were going to be able to communicate with your friends around the world by looking at your watch or with an iPad or an iPhone, you would think I was out of my mind.” Thirty or forty years from now, he said, “We’re going to have innovative solutions to fight back against sea-level rise that we cannot even imagine today.”

Many of the world’s largest cities sit along a coast, and all of them are, to one degree or another, threatened by rising seas. Entire countries are endangered—the Maldives, for instance, and the Marshall Islands. Globally, it’s estimated that a hundred million people live within three feet of mean high tide and another hundred million or so live within six feet of it. Hundreds of millions more live in areas likely to be affected by increasingly destructive storm surges.

Against this backdrop, South Florida still stands out. The region has been called “ground zero when it comes to sea-level rise.” It has also been described as “the poster child for the impacts of climate change,” the “epicenter for studying the effects of sea-level rise,” a “disaster scenario,” and “the New Atlantis.” Of all the world’s cities, Miami ranks second in terms of assets vulnerable to rising seas—No. 1 is Guangzhou—and in terms of population it ranks fourth, after Guangzhou, Mumbai, and Shanghai. A recent report on storm surges in the United States listed four Florida cities among the eight most at risk. (On that list, Tampa came in at No. 1.) For the past several years, the daily high-water mark in the Miami area has been racing up at the rate of almost an inch a year, nearly ten times the rate of average global sea-level rise. It’s unclear exactly why this is happening, but it’s been speculated that it has to do with changes in ocean currents which are causing water to pile up along the coast. Talking about climate change in the Everglades this past Earth Day, President Obama said, “Nowhere is it going to have a bigger impact than here in South Florida.”



“Cherish this moment, because clearly our parents are getting a divorce.”

The region's troubles start with its topography. Driving across South Florida is like driving across central Kansas, except that South Florida is greener and a whole lot lower. In Miami-Dade County, the average elevation is just six feet above sea level. The county's highest point, aside from man-made structures, is only about twenty-five feet, and no one seems entirely sure where it is. (The humorist Dave Barry once set out to climb Miami-Dade's tallest mountain, and ended up atop a local garbage dump nicknamed Mt. Trashmore.) Broward County, which includes Fort Lauderdale, is equally flat and low, and Monroe County, which includes the Florida Keys, is even more so.

But South Florida's problems also run deeper. The whole region—indeed, most of the state—consists of limestone that was laid down over the millions of years Florida sat at the bottom of a shallow sea. The limestone is filled with holes, and the holes are, for the most part, filled with water. (Near the surface, this is generally freshwater, which has a lower density than saltwater.)

Until the eighteen-eighties, when the first channels were cut through the region by steam-powered dredges, South Florida was one continuous wetland—the Everglades. Early efforts to drain the area were only half successful; Northerners lured by turn-of-the-century real-estate scams found the supposedly rich farmland they'd purchased was more suitable for swimming.

"I have bought land by the acre, and I have bought land by the foot; but, by God, I have never before bought land by the gallon," one arrival from Iowa complained.

Even today, with the Everglades reduced to half its former size, water in the region is constantly being shunted around. The South Florida Water Management District, a state agency, claims that it operates the "world's largest water control system," which includes twenty-three hundred miles of canals, sixty-one pump stations, and more than two thousand "water control structures." Floridians south of Orlando depend on this system to prevent their lawns from drowning and their front steps from becoming docks. (Basement flooding isn't an issue in South Florida, because

no one has a basement—the water table is too high.)

When the system was designed—redesigned, really—in the nineteen-fifties, the water level in the canals could be maintained at least a foot and a half higher than the level of high tide. Thanks to this difference in elevation, water flowed off the land toward the sea. At the same time, there was enough freshwater pushing out to prevent saltwater from pressing in. Owing in part to sea-level rise, the gap has since been cut by about eight inches, and the region faces the discomfiting prospect that, during storms, it will be inundated not just along the coasts but also inland, by rainwater that has nowhere to go. Researchers at Florida Atlantic University have found that with just six more inches of sea-level rise the district will lose almost half its flood-control capacity. Meanwhile, what's known as the saltwater front is advancing. One city—Hallandale Beach, just north of Miami—has already had to close most of its drinking wells, because the water is too salty. Many other cities are worried that they will have to do the same.

Jayantha Obeyesekera is the Water Management District's chief modeller, which means it's his job to foresee South Florida's future. One morning, I caught up with him at a flood-control structure known as S13, which sits on a canal known as C11, west of Fort Lauderdale.

"We have a triple whammy," he said. "One whammy is sea-level rise. Another whammy is the water table comes up higher, too. And in this area the higher the water table, the less space you have to absorb storm water. The third whammy is if the rainfall extremes change, and become more extreme. There are other whammies probably that I haven't mentioned. Someone said the other day, 'The water comes from six sides in Florida.'"

A month after the super blood moon, South Florida experienced another series of very high tides—"king tides," as Miamians call them. This time, I went out to see the effects

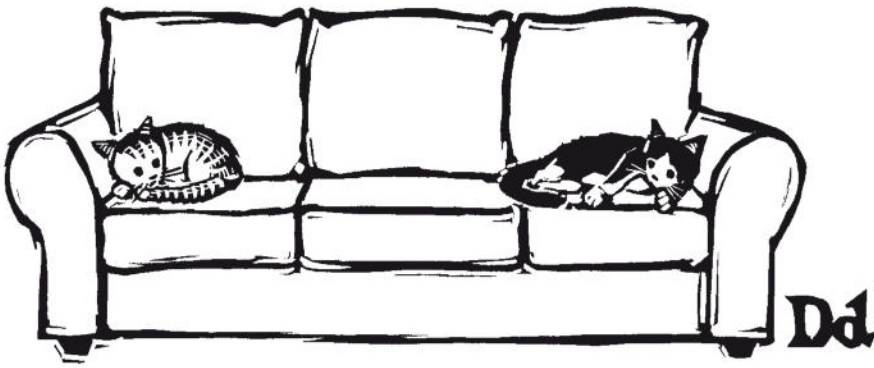
with Nicole Hernandez Hammer, an environmental-studies researcher who works for the Union of Concerned Scientists. Hammer had looked over elevation maps and decided that Shorecrest, about five miles north of downtown Miami, was a neighborhood where we were likely to find flooding. It was another hot, blue morning, and as we drove along, in Hammer's Honda, at first it seemed that she'd miscalculated. Then, all of a sudden, we arrived at a major intersection that was submerged. We parked and made our way onto a side street, also submerged. We were standing in front of a low-slung apartment building, debating what to do next, when one of the residents came by.

"I've been trying to figure out: Where is the water coming from?" he said. "It'll be drying up and then it'll be just like this again." He had complained to the building's superintendent. "I told him, 'Something needs to be done about this water, man.' He says he'll try to do something." A cable-repair truck trailing a large wake rolled by and then stalled out.

The water on the street was so deep that it was, indeed, hard to tell where it was coming from. Hammer explained that it was emerging from the storm drains. Instead of funnelling rainwater into the bay, as they were designed to do, the drains were directing water from the bay onto the streets. "The infrastructure we have is built for a world that doesn't exist anymore," she said.

Neither of us was wearing boots, a fact that, as we picked our way along, we agreed we regretted. I couldn't help recalling stories I'd heard about Miami's antiquated sewer system, which leaks so much raw waste that it's the subject of frequent lawsuits. (To settle a suit brought by the federal government, the county recently agreed to spend \$1.6 billion to upgrade the system, though many question whether the planned repairs adequately account for sea-level rise.) Across the soaked intersection, in front of a single-family home, a middle-aged man was unloading groceries from his car. He, too, told





"Every day I live in fear that our jobs will be replaced by pillows."

• •

us he didn't know where the water was coming from.

"I heard on the news it's because the moon turned red," he said. "I don't have that much detail about it." During the past month, he added, "it's happened very often." (In an ominous development, Miami this past fall experienced several very high tides at times of the month when, astronomically speaking, it shouldn't have.)

"Honestly, sometimes, when I'm talking to people, I think, Oh, I wish I had taken more psychology courses," Hammer told me. A lot of her job involves visiting low-lying neighborhoods like Shorecrest, helping people understand what they're seeing. She shows them elevation maps and climate-change projections, and explains that the situation is only going to get worse. Often, Hammer said, she feels like a doctor: "You hear that they're trying to teach these skills in medical schools, to encourage them to have a better bedside manner. I think I might try to get that kind of training, because it's really hard to break bad news."

It was garbage-collection day, and in front of one house county-issued trash bins bobbed in a stretch of water streaked with oil. Two young women were surveying the scene from the driveway, as if from a pier.

"It's horrible," one of them said to us. "Sometimes the water actually smells." They were sisters, originally from Colombia. They wanted to sell the house, but, as the other sister observed, "No one's going to want to buy it like this."

"I have called the city of Miami," the first sister said. "And they said it's just the moon. But I don't think it's the moon anymore."

After a couple of minutes, their mother came out. Hammer, who was born in Guatemala, began chatting with her in Spanish. "Oh," I heard the mother exclaim. "*Dios mío! El cambio climático!*"

Marco Rubio, Florida's junior senator, who has been running third in Republican primary polls, grew up not far from Shorecrest, in West Miami, which sounds like it's a neighborhood but is actually its own city. For several years, he served in Florida's House of Representatives, and his district included Miami's flood-vulnerable airport. Appearing this past spring on "Face the Nation," Rubio was asked to explain a statement he had made about climate change. He offered the following: "What I said is, humans are not responsible for climate change in the way some of these people out there are trying to make us believe, for the following reason: I believe that climate is changing because there's never been a moment where the climate is not changing."

Around the same time, it was revealed that aides to Florida's governor, Rick Scott, also a Republican, had instructed state workers not to discuss climate change, or even to use the term. The Scott administration, according to the Florida Center for Investigative Reporting, also tried to ban talk of sea-level rise; state employees were sup-

posed to speak, instead, of "nuisance flooding." Scott denied having imposed any such Orwellian restrictions, but I met several people who told me they'd bumped up against them. One was Hammer, who, a few years ago, worked on a report to the state about threats to Florida's transportation system. She said that she was instructed to remove all climate-change references from it. "In some places, it was impossible," she recalled. "Like when we talked about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which has 'climate change' in the title."

Scientists who study climate change (and the reporters who cover them) often speculate about when the partisan debate on the issue will end. If Florida is a guide, the answer seems to be never. During September's series of king tides, former Vice-President Al Gore spent a morning sloshing through the flooded streets of Miami Beach with Mayor Levine, a Democrat. I met up with Gore the following day, and he told me that the boots he'd worn had turned out to be too low; the water had poured in over the top.

"When the governor of the state is a full-out climate denier, the irony is just excruciatingly painful," Gore observed. He said that he thought Florida ought to "join with the Maldives and some of the small island states that are urging the world to adopt stronger restrictions on global-warming pollution."

Instead, the state is doing the opposite. In October, Florida filed suit against the Environmental Protection Agency, seeking to block new rules aimed at limiting warming by reducing power-plant emissions. (Two dozen states are participating in the lawsuit.)

"The level of disconnect from reality is pretty profound," Jeff Goodell, a journalist who's working on a book on the impacts of sea-level rise, told me. "We're sort of used to that in the climate world. But in Florida there are real consequences. The water is rising right now."

Meanwhile, people continue to flock to South Florida. Miami's metropolitan area, which includes Fort Lauderdale, has been one of the fastest growing in the country; from 2013

Tuning in to the World



JOHNNY DEPP AND THE HOLLYWOOD VAMPIRES FLIP THE SCRIPT IN RIO

When it comes to rock music and hearing loss, the relationship has always been crystal clear: overexposure to one leads to the other. While that's still true, one band has turned this truth on its ear, bringing the gift of hearing to more than 200 children and adults in Rio de Janeiro and offering many of them their very first opportunity to experience music of any kind. This past September, the supergroup Hollywood Vampires, featuring Alice Cooper, Johnny Depp, Joe Perry, Duff McKagan, Matt Sorum, Bruce Witkin and Tommy Henriksen, led a group of other enthusiastic celebrities and musicians (including Amber Heard, Sergio Mendes, Zak Starkey and Queens of the Stone Age) in Starkey Hearing Foundation's mission to fit those struggling with hearing loss with life-changing hearing aids. Many, who were able to hear their families and friends for the first time, were treated to a free concert by the band at the Rock in Rio Festival.



CHARLIZE THERON REACHES OUT & MAKES A JOYFUL NOISE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In conjunction with her Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project (CTAOP) to keep African youth safe from HIV/AIDS, the Oscar-winning superstar joined Starkey Hearing Foundation in South Africa, helping to fit more than 300 children with hearing aids. In a community center near King William's Town, Theron watched in delight as children received hearing aids and heard their first clear sounds.



Theron, whose organization funds many community-based NGOs in South Africa, was hands-on in this effort, helping a local acoustician fit the hearing aids. Once the aids were in place, she made playful sounds in the children's ears to test their hearing, provoking peals of laughter and even a bit of jumping for joy among the hearing aid recipients and volunteers alike.

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to 2014, in absolute terms it added more residents than San Francisco and, proportionally speaking, it outdid Los Angeles and New York. Currently, in downtown Miami there are more than twenty-five thousand new condominium units either proposed or under construction. Much of the boom is being financed by “flight capital” from countries like Argentina and Venezuela; something like half of recent home sales in Miami were paid for in cash.

And just about everyone who can afford to buy near the water. Not long ago, Kenneth Griffin, a hedge-fund billionaire, bought a penthouse in Miami Beach for sixty million dollars, the highest amount ever paid for a single-family residence in Miami-Dade County (and ten million dollars more than the original asking price). The penthouse, in a new building called Faena House, offers eight bedrooms and a seventy-foot rooftop pool. When I read about the sale, I plugged the building’s address into a handy program called the Sea Level Rise Toolbox, created by students and professors at Florida International University. According to the program, with a little more than one foot of rise the roads around the building will frequently flood. With two feet, most of the streets will be underwater, and with three it seems that, if Faena House is still habitable, it will be accessible only by boat.

I asked everyone I met in South Florida who seemed at all concerned about sea-level rise the same question: What could be done? More than a quarter of the Netherlands is below sea level and those areas are home to millions of people, so low-elevation living is certainly possible. But the geology of South Florida is peculiarly intractable. Building a dike on porous limestone is like putting a fence on top of a tunnel: it alters the route of travel, but not necessarily the amount.

“You can’t build levees on the coast and stop the water” is the way Jayantha Obeyesekera put it. “The water would just come underground.”

Some people told me that they thought the only realistic response for South Florida was retreat.

“I live opposite a park,” Philip Stoddard, the mayor of South Miami—also a city in its own right—told me. “And there’s a low area in it that fills up when it rains. I was out there this morning walking my dog, and I saw fish in it. Where the heck did the fish come from? They came from underground. We have fish that travel underground!”

“What that means is, there’s no keeping the water out,” he went on. “So ultimately this area has to depopulate. What I want to work toward is a slow and graceful depopulation, rather than a sudden and catastrophic one.”

More often, I heard echoes of Mayor Levine’s Apple Watch line. Who knows what amazing breakthroughs the future will bring?

“I think people are underestimating the incredible innovative imagination in the world of adaptive design,” Harvey Ruvin, the Clerk of the Courts of Miami-Dade County and the chairman of the county’s Sea Level Rise Task Force, said when I went to visit him in his office. A quote from Buckminster Fuller hung on the wall: “We are all passengers on Spaceship Earth.” Ruvin became friendly with Fuller in the nineteen-sixties, after reading about a plan Fuller had drawn up for a floating city in Tokyo Bay.

“I would agree that things can’t con-

tinue exactly the way they are today,” Ruvin told me. “But what we will evolve to may be better.”

I keep telling people, “This is my patient,” Bruce Mowry, Miami Beach’s city engineer, was saying. “I can’t lose my patient. If I don’t do anything, Miami Beach may not be here.” It was yet another day of bright-blue skies and “nuisance flooding,” and I was walking with Mowry through one of Miami Beach’s lowest neighborhoods, Sunset Harbour.

If Miami Beach is on a gurney, then Mowry might be said to be thumping its chest. It’s his job to keep the city viable, and since no one has yet come up with a smart-watch-like breakthrough, he’s been forced to rely on more primitive means, like pumps and asphalt. We rounded a corner and came to a set of stairs, which led down to some restaurants and shops. Until recently, Mowry explained, the shops and the street had been at the same level. But the street had recently been raised. It was now almost a yard higher than the sidewalk.

“I call this my five-step program,” he said. “What are the five steps?” He counted off the stairs as we descended: “One, two, three, four, five.” Some restaurants had set up tables at the bottom,



“You the guy who donated his body to science?”

next to what used to be a curb but now, with the elevation of the road, is a three-foot wall. Cars whizzed by at the diners' eye level. I found the arrangement disconcerting, as if I'd suddenly shrunk. Mowry told me that some of the business owners, who had been unhappy when the street flooded, now were unhappy because they had no direct access to the road: "It's, like, can you win?"

Several nearby streets had also been raised, by about a foot. The elevated roadbeds were higher than the driveways, which now all sloped down. The parking lot of a car-rental agency sat in a kind of hollow.

I asked about the limestone problem. "That is the one that scares us more than anything," Mowry said. "New Orleans, the Netherlands—everybody understands putting in barriers, perimeter levees, pumps. Very few people understand: What do you do when the water's coming up through the ground?"

"What I'd really like to do is pick the whole city up, spray on a membrane, and drop it back down," he went on. I thought of Calvino's "Invisible Cities," where such fantastical engineering schemes are the norm.

Mowry said he was intrigued by the possibility of finding some kind of resin that could be injected into the limestone. The resin would fill the holes, then set to form a seal. Or, he suggested, perhaps one day the city would require that builders, before constructing a house, lay a waterproof shield underneath it, the way a camper spreads a tarp under a tent. Or maybe some sort of clay could be pumped into the ground that would ooze out and fill the interstices.

"Will it hold?" Mowry said of the clay. "I doubt it. But these are things we're exploring." It was hard to tell how seriously he took any of these ideas; even if one of them turned out to be workable, the effort required to, in effect, caulk the entire island seemed staggering. At one point, Mowry declared, "If we can put a man on the moon, then we can figure out a way to keep Miami Beach dry." At another, he mused about the city's reverting to "what it came from," which was largely mangrove swamp: "I'm sure if we had poets, they'd be writing about the swallowing of Miami Beach by the sea."

We headed back toward Mowry's office around the time of maximum high tide. The elevated streets were still dry, but on the way to City Hall we came to an unreconstructed stretch of road that was flooding. Evidently, this situation had been anticipated, because two mobile pumps, the size and shape of ice-cream trucks, were parked near the quickly expanding pool. Neither was operating. After making a couple of phone calls, Mowry decided that he would try to switch them on himself. As he fiddled with the controls, I realized that we were standing not far from the drowned palm tree I'd seen on my first day in Miami Beach, and that it was once again underwater.

About a dozen miles due west of Miami, the land gives out, and what's left of the Everglades begins. The best way to get around in this part of Florida is by airboat, and on a gray morning I set out in one with a hydrologist named Christopher McVoy. We rented the boat from a concession run by members of the Miccosukee tribe, which, before the Europeans arrived, occupied large swaths of Georgia and Tennessee. The colonists hounded the Miccosukee ever farther south, until, eventually, they ended up with a few hundred mostly flooded square miles between Miami and Naples. On a fence in front of the dock, a sign read, "Beware: Wild alligators are dangerous. Do not feed or tease." Our guide, Betty Osceola, handed out headsets to block the noise of the rotors, and we zipped off.

The Everglades is often referred to as a "river of grass," but it might just as accurately be described as a prairie of water. Where the airboats had made a track, the water was open, but mostly it was patchy—interrupted by clumps of sawgrass and an occasional tree island. We hadn't been out very long when it started to pour. As the boat sped into the rain, it felt as if we were driving through a sandstorm.

The same features that now make South Florida so vulnerable—its flatness, its high water table, its heavy rains—are the features that brought the Everglades into being. Before the drainage canals were dug, water flowed from Lake Okeechobee, about seventy

miles north of Miami, to Florida Bay, about forty miles to the south of the city, in one wide, slow-moving sheet. Now much of the water is diverted, and the water that does make it to the wetlands gets impounded, so the once continuous "sheet flow" is no more. There's a comprehensive Everglades restoration plan, which goes by the acronym CERP, but this has got hung up on one political snag after another, and climate change adds yet one more obstacle. The Everglades is a freshwater ecosystem; already, at the southern margin of Everglades National Park, the water is becoming salty. The sawgrass is in retreat, and mangroves are moving in. In coming decades, there's likely to be more and more demand for the freshwater that remains. As McVoy put it, "You've got a big chunk of agriculture, a big chunk of people, and a big chunk of nature reserve all competing for the same resources."

The best that can be hoped for with the restoration project is that it will prolong the life of the wetland and, with that, of Miami's drinking-water system. But you can't get around geophysics. Send the ice sheets into "irreversible decline," as it seems increasingly likely we have done, and there's no going back. Eventually, the Everglades, along with Shorecrest and Miami Beach and much of the rest of South Florida, will be inundated. And, if Hal Wanless is right, eventually isn't very far off.

To me, the gunmetal expanse of water and grass appeared utterly without markers, but Osceola, who could read the subtlest of ridges, knew exactly where we were at every moment. We stopped to have sandwiches on an island with enough dry land for a tiny farm, and stopped again at a research site that McVoy had set up in the muck. There was a box of electrical equipment on stilts, and a solar panel to provide power. McVoy dropped out of the boat to collect some samples in empty water-cooler bottles. The rain let up, and then started again. ♦

O PIONEERS DEPARTMENT

From the Oak Harbor (Wash.) Whidbey News-Times.

At 6:34 p.m., a Tee Place resident reported that a tortoise was missing. It responds to "Dexter."

A black and white portrait of a woman with short, wavy blonde hair, smiling and looking off to the side. She is wearing a dark turtleneck sweater. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

AMAZING
THINGS
ARE
HAPPENING
HERE

AMAZING IS WAKING UP.

"It was like a flashbulb went off in my eyes." That's the last thing Nancy Jarecki remembers before a blood vessel in her brain exploded. Forty percent of people who suffer brain aneurysms like Nancy's don't survive. And of those who do, many have severely impaired brain function. But the skilled neurosurgery team at NewYork-Presbyterian helped Nancy beat the odds. When she opened her eyes in the recovery room, she wasn't just awake—she was, to her own amazement, very much herself.

 **NewYork-Presbyterian**

nyp.org/amazingthings

THE HIT LIST

The Islamist war on secular bloggers in Bangladesh.

BY SAMANTH SUBRAMANIAN



On the afternoon of February 26th, Avijit Roy was in Dhaka, finishing a column for BDNews24, a Bangladeshi Web site of news and commentary. Its title, in Bengali, was “Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?,” and it adapted ideas from his new book, a primer on cosmology. For Roy, who was forty-two, science trumped religion. He took after his father, Ajoy, an emeritus physics professor at Dhaka University and an ardent rationalist. “I don’t bother about whether God exists,” Ajoy Roy told me. “Let him do his business, and let me do my business.” Avijit, even more vocal than his father, liked to compare faith to a virus—infesting human beings

and impelling them into conflict. He once wrote, “The vaccine against religion is to build up a scientific approach.”

Roy and his wife, Rafida Ahmed, an executive at a credit-rating agency, lived in Atlanta. They had fallen in love from afar: in 2001, Roy started a collective blog called Mukto Mona, or Free Thinker, and Ahmed wrote to him after reading one of his posts, agreeing with his dismissal of religion as “fairy tales.” In 2006, Roy moved to Atlanta, where he worked as a software architect. But his real interests emerged in his blog posts, and in several books in which he dismantled the dogmas of religious belief—of his own Hindu background,

but also of Islam, the state religion in Sunni-majority Bangladesh. “He was an *addabaaq*,” his father said. He used the word to mean “gossip,” but it also hinted at his son’s love of argument.

Mukto Mona’s comments section often drew irate Islamists, and Roy waded into earnest debates with them. He could seem as inflexible as the people he bickered with, refusing to acknowledge any grace or meaning that religion might grant its faithful. When one commenter claimed that the Koran was a repository of scientific wisdom, Roy asked why the Islamic world was “so behind in science and technology?,” and added, “Even Israel has more scientists than all the Muslim countries nowadays.” His father warned him that he was “too passionate.” On Facebook, one extremist wrote, “Avijit Roy lives in America, so it’s not possible to kill him right now. But he will be killed when he comes back.”

When Roy told his parents that he planned to visit in February, his father tried to dissuade him. “Dhaka is now not a very good place. The law-and-order situation is worsening day by day,” Ajoy Roy said. “I pointed out, ‘You’re a targeted person. Your name has been publicized as an atheist.’”

Roy and Ahmed went anyway, staying at her family’s house, not far from the city center. After finishing his column, Roy wanted to visit the Ekushey Book Fair, where hundreds of booksellers and publishers gather every February to celebrate Bengali literature. Ahmed and Roy attended an event hosted by Roy’s publisher before browsing through a section of children’s books. A photograph on Facebook shows them sitting on the ground. Roy, wearing a red kurta, is looking down; next to him, Ahmed reaches into a paper bag for a snack.

At around 8 P.M., as they walked toward their rented car, a young boy asked Roy for a handout. He gave the boy a hundred takas—a little more than a dollar—and an admonition to go home. Ahmed doesn’t recall the men who rushed at Roy and hacked at him with machetes, and she doesn’t recall trying to stop them. She received several wounds to her head and another that severed her left thumb. Later, in photographs of the attack, she noticed that there had been policemen standing nearby; they did nothing to intervene. Roy fell to the sidewalk, face

A list of eighty-four bloggers was sent to newspapers in 2013. Four are now dead.

down; his attackers dropped their weapons and ran away. By the time his father reached the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Roy was dead.

Roy's murder was claimed by a Twitter account belonging to the Ansarullah Bangla Team, an Islamic militant group. He was an American citizen, the tweets noted, and his death avenged the actions of the United States against ISIS. A Bangladeshi police official called the group the "closest relative" of Al Qaeda on the Indian subcontinent, and it has been linked to the murders of at least five other secular voices—the first in 2013, but the others since Roy's death, at the rate of roughly one every other month. In October, when I visited Dhaka, there had been no attacks for eleven weeks, and the writers I met seemed to be steeling themselves for bad news. Three days after I left, Roy's publisher was killed in his office, and, elsewhere in the city, another publisher and two bloggers were attacked.

Of the six who have died, four were on a list of eighty-four "atheist bloggers," which was sent anonymously to newspapers in 2013. In nearly every attack, the weapon has been a machete. Two dozen suspects have been arrested, but so much doubt persists over the killings—and over the government's handling of them—that Dhaka is rife with conspiracy theories. Some of the bloggers who number among the eighty-four revealed suspicions that the state's security agencies ordered the hits.

Ahmed and Roy hadn't anticipated Bangladesh's lurch into murderous extremism. "I don't think we missed it because we were away," Ahmed told me. "I think this is a sudden shift, but it has been cooking for a while." A few days before his death, Ahmed said, Roy had given her a tour of the places where he grew up. "We walked around the university campus. He showed me where he lived when he was little. He showed me his elementary school. He used to say, 'Who will touch me in my own neighborhood?'"

In Dhaka, conversations about the killings inevitably circle back to 1971, when Bangladesh broke away from Pakistan, whose strict Islamic pieties and Urdu culture encroached on Bengali liberalism. The Ekushey Book Fair occupies a sprawling park called Suhrawardy

Udyan, where, in March, 1971, a politician named Mujibur Rahman urged an audience of two million to embrace civil disobedience and turn East Pakistan into an independent Bangladesh. The speech, an electric moment in Bangladesh's history, is depicted in posters that still hang in many living rooms in Dhaka.

The ensuing "liberation war," as Bangladeshis call it, is commemorated in a museum in the park, a half-buried, brutalist gallery whose raw-concrete shell staves off Dhaka's soggy heat. Photographs of corpses, alone or in great piles, often charred, run along one wall. Some estimates suggest that Pakistan's armed forces killed half a million people in the nine-month war, but most Bangladeshis—in particular, those from the Awami League, the political party that Rahman once led—say that the toll was closer to three million; they also call it a genocide. Early in December, 1971, the Indian Army intervened, hastening Pakistan's defeat. Two weeks later, in Suhrawardy Udyan, the commander of Pakistan's occupying forces surrendered, granting Bangladesh its independence. The war's violence and the actions of Bengalis who collaborated with Pakistani forces remain the source of many of Bangladesh's political questions. The word *razakar*, or "volunteer," once used to describe members of pro-Pakistan militias, has entered colloquial Bengali as a scathing pejorative.

In 2008, an Awami League government was elected on the promise of establishing a war-crimes tribunal. Initially, the European Union, Human Rights Watch, and the United Nations gave the trials their blessing, but before long observers began to suspect that the government was using them to punish opposition parties. In 2011, Human Rights Watch noted that state officials were harassing defense lawyers and witnesses. The tribunal's three-judge panels handed out death sentences and lengthy prison terms to members of the Bangladesh National Party, the main opposition party, and of the Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamist party and a B.N.P. ally that, in 1971, had opposed the independence movement.

Even so, in early 2013 a contrary fear—that the Awami League had secretly agreed to be lenient toward the Jamaat—began to find purchase in Bangladesh. One Jamaat member, convicted

of multiple murders and of the rape of an eleven-year-old girl, received a life sentence. Kowshik Ahmed, who writes for a Web site called Somewhere In Blog, and whose name was on the hit list, told me that anything short of capital punishment seemed to be a concession. "People thought the Awami League took money" in return for a gentler verdict, he said. In protest, a few dozen bloggers and student organizers occupied Shahbag, an intersection near the northern corner of Suhrawardy Udyan. Shahbag became a symbol for the bloggers, a testament to their power to organize. By the middle of February, the crowd had grown to more than a hundred thousand people, calling for the abolition of the Jamaat and for more death penalties.

Kowshik, as he is called, is a stocky, bald forty-one-year-old. When I met him, at a coffee shop a few miles from Shahbag, he was wearing a T-shirt that said, "Everything Will Be Fine." We were joined by his friend Baki Billah, a former student leader and a stalwart at the Shahbag protests. Billah was slim and wore a wispy beard. His English was hesitant, and he stared into the distance as he talked, trying to hoist phrases out of his memory. Kowshik and Billah were competitive conversationalists, pitting their recollections of events against each other. Sometimes they veered into Bengali to confirm facts before presenting them to me.

I told them that it seemed odd that Shahbag's liberal protesters were demanding the death penalty. "The death penalty wasn't actually our goal," Kowshik said. Then, with pretzel-shaped logic, he added, "We were demanding the highest punishment possible."

Billah jumped in. "If the highest punishment possible was life imprisonment, we would have demanded that," he said. "Since the liberation war, these people, these war criminals, have lived in Bangladesh like kings. Our anger towards them was very high."

Kowshik started blogging in 2006, well before Somewhere In Blog became the largest community of Bengali bloggers, with more than a hundred thousand contributors. Facebook had not yet arrived in Bangladesh, so blogs functioned as a social medium, connecting members who were scattered across the country or living overseas. Kowshik's

family came from Barisal, in the south. His father worked for the government, and they moved every three years. After studying literature at a Barisal college, Kowshik went to Dhaka to find work. He wrote poetry and maintained a journal, but he found no readers until he discovered blogging, like many other young, secular urbanites. “For everyone, this was new,” Kowshik said. “There was a feeling of free space. People who were critical of religion could express themselves without any hesitation, without any restrictions.” In one post, Kowshik satirized the thoughts of an Islamic fundamentalist: “The people outside my community are lower than dogs. My war is against those who are not my brothers. So I look for any wrongdoing by non-Muslims. . . . Allah . . . made us fortunate enough to put such people to the sword.” When the assaults on bloggers began, Kowshik deleted the post.

The comments sections on most of Bangladesh’s political blogs tend to devolve into ad-hominem attacks. On one post from Somewhere In Blog, on Islam and terrorism, angry readers contend that the author knows nothing about Islam, that he is part of a conspiracy against the religion, that his audacity will earn him a quick death. The trolls and the counter-trolls—the standard side effects of the Internet—would be risible were the consequences not so tragic.

The first hint that the rancor had spilled into the physical world came a month before the Shahbag protests, in January, 2013, when a blogger named Asif Mohiuddin was attacked by three men armed with knives and machetes. Mohiuddin, an atheist who, on Somewhere In Blog, had called God “Almighty only in name but impotent in reality,” survived a deep gash to his neck. Then, in February, as Shahbag gained momentum, another blogger, Ahmed Rajib Haider, was murdered near his home by five young Ansarullah recruits. The night before the murder, they had played cricket in front of Haider’s house, in order to scope out the terrain.

In the spring of 2013, a conservative group, Hefazat-e-Islam, staged two large rallies in Dhaka, demanding capital punishment for every “atheist blogger.” When the list of eighty-four bloggers began circulating in newspapers and on social media, Kowshik discovered that

THE ROBOTS

When they choose to take material form they will resemble
Dragonflies, not machines. Their wings will shimmer.

Like the chorus of Greek drama they will speak
As many, but in the first person singular.

Their colors in the sky will canopy the surface of the earth.
In varying unison and diapason they will dance the forgotten.

Their judgment in its pure accuracy will resemble grace and in
Their circuits the one form of action will be understanding.

Their exquisite sensors will comprehend our very dust
And re-create the best and the worst of us, as though in art.

—Robert Pinsky

his name was on it. The list wasn’t well thought out, he found. It included Haider’s name, even though he was dead, and many duplications, mentioning bloggers by their names and again by their handles. But its provenance was the bigger mystery. Newspaper reports were unable to determine whether it was compiled by Hefazat, as part of the demand for the executions of the bloggers, or by the government, in an initiative to prosecute bloggers who were critical of Islam. No one has yet claimed authorship of the list.

In April, the police arrested four bloggers, under a vague law criminalizing electronic publications that might offend the followers of any religion, disturb law and order, or “deprave and corrupt” readers. To many, the arrests appeared to be an attempt to appease Islamic conservatives. Sara Hossain, a prominent human-rights lawyer, told me, “There’s a general climate of fear that the police can come after you at any time. The fact is the state isn’t robust enough to protect you, or perhaps even interested in protecting you.”

Kowshik, learning that the police were looking for him, fled to Nepal, returning only after the other bloggers had been released on bail, a month later. “Over the next couple of months, nothing happened,” Kowshik said. “And nothing happened in 2014 also.” Then Roy was killed, and Kowshik grew fearful again. Besides going to work every day, he said, “I’ve

been totally confined at home.” He meets few friends, and he never takes his children out; his relatives keep their distance. “Now they all know I’m an atheist, because my name has appeared in the papers,” he said. “So they do not like me.” He has stopped blogging—or even posting on Facebook—about current events. Occasionally, he writes about cinema, but, he said, “If I can’t write about politics and religion, I feel I have nothing to write.” And he changed his footwear.

I looked at his feet, clad in gray Power sneakers with banana-yellow laces. “So that you can run?”

“So that I can run.”

The details of the bloggers’ lives and deaths seem to constitute a morbid parable about the turbulent novelty of social media. “It’s the speed at which these pieces are disseminated online,” Tahmina Rahman, the director of the Bangladesh chapter of Article 19, a nonprofit that defends free speech, told me. “Sometimes these pieces aren’t very well thought out, so when they contain provocative material in a language that borders on abusive they reach their readers in a raw fashion.” Like the majority of Bangladesh’s Muslims, Rahman disapproved of the most outrageous of the pieces. Still, she criticized the government for its “lukewarm and apologetic” response, and for its readiness to freeze speech. In mid-November, the government executed two war criminals—a

Jamaat member and a B.N.P. leader. Anticipating protests, it blocked access to Facebook, WhatsApp, and Viber for more than two weeks. For seventy-five minutes, the Internet was shut down altogether.

One afternoon, I visited Hasanul Haq Inu, Bangladesh's information minister. He sat at a vast desk, across from a wall hung with six small televisions on mute and a large one broadcasting the news at a low grumble. During the liberation war, Inu trained ten thousand guerrillas. In the late seventies, after being found guilty of revolting against the military junta that governed Bangladesh, he spent five years in prison. Now he heads a Socialist party allied with the Awami League. He is a large, calm man with a polite manner; when he learned that I had a British passport, he expressed regret that one of the suspects in Roy's murder was a British citizen of Bangladeshi origin.

When I arrived in Dhaka, two men, one Italian and the other Japanese, had recently been murdered, their deaths claimed by ISIS as a warning to "citizens of the crusader coalition." Cesare Tavella, an aid worker, was shot while jogging in Dhaka's diplomatic enclave; Kunio Hoshi, an agronomist who had been in the country for five months, was shot in the countryside far to the north. Midway through my stay, heavy security for a Shia procession in Dhaka failed to stop three homemade bombs from exploding, killing two people and injuring more than a hundred. ISIS claimed this attack as well.

Inu ascribed the murders to religious fanatics and linked them to the Jamaat party. The Jamaat had covert operatives, he said: "Around seven thousand, eight thousand Jamaat members were sent to Afghanistan when bin Laden was there, have been trained, and have come back." (These assertions, often advanced by government officials, have never been substantiated.) Other groups, too, were preparing for a Sunni revolution, he said. "The hell with Shiism. The hell with Hinduism. That's what they're propagating."

The government insists that, although the local terror groups may owe

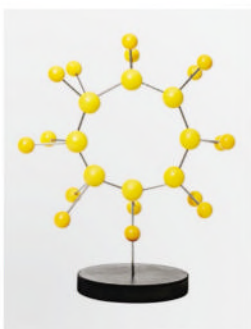
some allegiance to Al Qaeda, they have nothing to do with ISIS, whose claims for various attacks remain unverified. But in a November issue of ISIS's English-language periodical, *Dabiq*, an article titled "The Revival of Jihad in Bengal" described fighters in Bangladesh "busy preparing for further attack." A crisply recorded audio file on SoundCloud exhorted listeners, in sing-song Bengali, to commence jihad and join the caliphate.

It is likely that ISIS is asserting ownership of local Islamist terror groups. Whether the activities of these groups suggest a rise in religiosity in Bangladesh is difficult to say, Hossain, the human-rights lawyer, told me. But, she added, "Anecdotally, I see more hijabs, more beards, more people in their twenties doing their prayers than when I was in my twenties." Amena Mohsin, a professor of international relations at Dhaka University, was more certain. "People go to the Middle East and come back thinking a certain way," she said. "There's Wahhabi money flowing in." Mohsin told me that her maid had recently gone home to her village and returned wearing a burka. "It gives her an increased status," Mohsin said. "In that area, near Chittagong, by and large everyone supports the Hefazat." In the past, the politicians of the Awami League had sounded such grave alarms about fundamentalist Islam that, Mohsin said, "the religious have come to think that Islam is under attack."

I asked Inu if the government had drawn up the list of bloggers. "The official position is that there is no such official list," he said, but he admitted that security agencies might keep a roster of provocative writers. He also denied that the Hefazat-e-Islam had given

the government the list, as part of a demand for the execution of atheists. "Our position vis-à-vis Hefazat is very tough," he said. "There is no official dialogue with Hefazat." At the same time, he said, the state had a duty to prosecute those who offended the sentiments of the faithful. Some bloggers were guilty "of using very filthy language against Prophet Muhammad."

Inu argued that the government had



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responded efficiently to the murders, and his office later sent me an update on the investigations: seven people arrested for Roy's death, eighteen out of fifty-five hearings completed in the trial of six men for killing Haider, and so on. But Rafida Ahmed said that no one from the police office had taken her statement. The wife of another blogger, who witnessed her husband's murder at their home in August, told me that the police had paraded four arrested men before her. She recognized none of them.

It appears that the government is constantly calibrating its position on the murders. In 2013, when Haider was killed, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called him a martyr. Hasina, the daughter of Mujibur Rahman, has styled the Awami League as the guardian of the country's minorities and of its liberal values, but she remains mindful that she governs a predominantly Muslim nation. Secularism was enshrined as one of the four principles of Bangladesh's constitution, but in 1977 it was removed, and the Koranic phrase "Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim" was added. In 2010, under Hasina's administration, the Supreme Court restored secularism to the constitution, but her law minister admitted that the document's Koranic phrase would remain.

More recently, Hasina has advised writers to refrain from distorting religious beliefs. When she did not publicly condemn Roy's murder, her son and adviser, Sajeeb Wazed, told Reuters, "We

are walking a fine line here. We don't want to be seen as atheists." Another government adviser told me, "If we allowed bloggers to write shit about Prophet Muhammad, the people would reject us." He added, "They'd think we started all this with our secularism business. That's the reality. This isn't London or New York. This is Dhaka."

In September, the security forces arrested Mohammad Abul Bashar, calling him the acting leader of the Ansarullah Bangla Team. His older brother, who founded Ansarullah, was arrested in 2013 for Haider's murder, so Bashar had run the group in his absence. Ansarullah denied that Bashar was its leader, calling the government's claims "pitiful." Two weeks later, the organization released its own hit list, of twenty writers who live overseas, their names printed under a logo resembling the black flag of ISIS. Rafida Ahmed is on the list; so are several bloggers who have moved abroad since 2013. Others are making plans to emigrate. Late one evening, I met Kowshik's friend Shammi Haq, a twenty-two-year-old woman who has written critically about the dominance of men in Islam and other religions, and who was hoping to leave Bangladesh in the coming weeks.

Haq was waiflike and nervous. She had to take a sleeping pill every night, she said, and, while we talked, she kept looking out the window with trepida-

tion. She'd received many threats online, and one day, late in August, two men followed her as she walked to the market to buy vegetables. "I took a detour into a shopping mall on the way, and they came in there, too," she said. She bumped into a friend, who surreptitiously took a photograph of the men. Haq showed the photograph to the police, who placed her under protection. "The policemen are here even now," she said. "But I'm not allowed to point them out."

Her friend Niloy Chatterjee, a forty-year-old blogger who founded an association of rationalists, had been on the original hit list. In mid-May, heading home from a rally protesting another blogger's murder, Chatterjee found that he was being trailed by two men. When he tried to lodge a complaint with the police, he wrote on Facebook, he was told to "leave the country as soon as possible." Through the summer, Chatterjee lay low, even staying in his parents' village for two weeks. Not long after he returned to Dhaka, on a lazy Friday afternoon, he was in his apartment with his wife, Ashamone, and her sister when four men with machetes broke in. Before killing Chatterjee, they pushed the sisters onto the balcony, Ashamone told me. When she was able to get back into the living room, she said, "the place was flooded with blood." One of the killers had pulled a fresh shirt out of his bag and discarded his bloodstained one near the apartment gate before joining the others in a waiting auto rickshaw.

Ashamone was temporarily staying in a spare room at the office of an N.G.O. A duffelbag lay half packed on a cot. Ashamone, perched on a plastic chair, wore a trace of pink lipstick that matched the color of her shalwar kameez. With her left hand, she picked at a scab forming over a scratch on her right thumb. "I cut myself yesterday, and it pained so much," she said. "Then I thought, How much pain Niloy must have gone through."

"Niloy used to think our house was safe," Ashamone continued. "But now I can't imagine any place is safe." She wanted to flee Bangladesh, but she didn't like the idea of being a refugee. "And if we, the freethinkers, don't stay we leave the country in the hands of the fundamentalists. Those people will rule here. They will win. Why should we leave it all to them?" ♦



"Meetingpalooza" sounded better in the brochure."

APPS TO DOWNLOAD FOR 2016

BY MIKE ALBO AND AMANDA DUARTE

D-CIDE

The old gang is going out to dinner. One has a newborn. One just got divorced. One is allergic to both nuts and vinyl. Type it all in, and the app will find a perfectly adequate and accommodating restaurant within a five-mile radius.

friend is “a pretentious dud”? OopsHa will, within twenty minutes, automatically text the errant recipient and blame it on autocorrect.

Crowdz

Locate a nearby bar or restaurant that is free of inexplicably wealthy

open, like a four-year-old? This white-noise app cuts out seventy-two per cent of disgusting smacky eating noises. Settings include Banana, Mac and Cheese, Movie Popcorn, and Fingernails!

AppChoo

Just sneezed and feeling lonely? Hire someone nearby to say “Bless you!” within seconds.

Looky

Isn’t human eye contact gross? Looky streams a video of the person right in front of you in the corner of your screen. Use it while ordering your pour-over coffee, testifying in court, walking down the street, or even watching live theatre. You’ll never have



uHUH

Turn on this app when talking with a narcissistic friend. It will provide responses like “Right!” “Really?” and “No way!” as you multitask.

NoIDontHaveAMinute

A map feature that identifies the locations of those annoying clipboard people and gives you an alternate walking route to your destination. Hit the “I Feel Guilty” button to donate instantly to Greenpeace.

Avoyd

Notifies you when your neighbors have left the building, so you don’t have to run into them in the hallway.

OopsHa

Did you accidentally include Amy in a group text about how her new boy-

thirtysomethings screaming at one another about wine, real estate, and their P.R. jobs.

PemaFinder

Finds the perfect Pema Chödrön quote to send to your friend when she texts you *again* about how depressed she is: “Resisting what is happening is a major cause of suffering”; “Steep your soul”; “You are the sky. Everything else—it’s just the weather.”

WaitrHatr

From this crowdsourced list, find out *before* you make dinner plans if someone you are talking to on Tinder is a rude, bad-tipping monster to waiters.

WhoRaisedU

Sitting next to one of those adults who still chews with his or her mouth

to look up from your phone again!

UnGentrify

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THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Can a cheap, portable microscope revolutionize global health?

BY CAROLYN KORMANN



Fig. 1.

Antoni van Leeuwenhoek wrote a letter to the Royal Society of London, in 1683, announcing the discovery of something extraordinary in his mouth. He was a haberdasher by trade, in the Dutch city of Delft, but he was known for his enthusiastic work with microscopes, which he made himself. By modern standards, Leeuwenhoek's devices were rudimentary, and fickle in their operation. They were nearly flat, consisting of a tiny magnifying glass sandwiched between metal plates, with an adjustable spit to hold the sample being viewed. But they could be effective, particularly when an unsqueamish eye was at the peephole. Leeuwenhoek

had already examined eels' blood, dogs' sperm, and the bile of elderly rabbits, among other substances. Now he had turned his attention to dental plaque.

Leeuwenhoek had an intensive routine of oral prophylaxis, which involved rubbing salt on his teeth each morning and buffing his molars with a cloth after meals. Nevertheless, he wrote, the plaque lay "thick as if 'twere batter." He scraped some off, mixed it with rainwater, deposited a droplet on one of his microscopes, and held it up to the light. The sample was teeming with "many very little living animalcules, very prettily a-moving." When he reproduced the experiment with the plaque of an old

man, he found even wilder specimens, which "bent their body into curves." Leeuwenhoek had revealed a world that few of his contemporaries were willing to believe existed. As he lamented to another microscopist in 1680, "I suffer many contradictions, and oft-times hear it said that I do but tell fairy-tales about the little animals."

In September, a biophysicist named Manu Prakash examined some of his own plaque, at high magnification, in honor of the anniversary of Leeuwenhoek's letter. Prakash, who is thirty-five, is slightly built, with curly brown hair, a beard, and a birthmark like a child's thumbprint over the bridge of his nose. He doesn't floss, and perhaps for that reason he found that his plaque contained spirochetes, bacteria that bend their bodies into curves when they move—what Leeuwenhoek observed in the old man. Prakash has his own laboratory in Stanford University's bio-engineering department, and he is best known for having invented a microscope, which was inspired by Leeuwenhoek's. He has a passion for what he calls the "microcosmos," meaning all things infinitesimal. "It's not good enough to read about it," he told me. "You have to experience it."

One major difference between the two microscopes is that Prakash's is made almost entirely from a sheet of paper. He calls it the Foldscope, and it comes in a kit. (Mine arrived in a nine-by-twelve-inch envelope.) The paper is printed with botanical illustrations and perforated with several shapes, which can be punched out and, with a series of origami-style folds, woven together into a single unit. The end result is about the size of a bookmark. The lens—a speck of plastic, situated in the center—provides a hundred and forty times magnification. The kit includes a second lens, of higher magnification, and a set of stick-on magnets, which can be used to attach the Foldscope to a smartphone, allowing for easy recording of a sample with the phone's camera. I put my kit together in fifteen minutes, and when I popped the lens into place it was with the satisfaction of spreading the wings of a paper crane.

The Foldscope performs most of the functions of a high-school lab microscope, but its parts cost less than a

Manu Prakash seeks to bring a minuscule world to the masses.

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dollar. Last year, with a grant from Gordon Moore's philanthropic foundation (Moore co-founded Intel), Prakash and some of his graduate students launched an experiment in mass microscopy, mailing fifty thousand free Foldscoptes to people in more than a hundred and thirty countries, who had volunteered to test the devices. At the same time, they created Foldscope Explore, a Web site where recipients of the kits can share photos, videos, and commentary. A plant pathologist in Rwanda uses the Foldscope to study fungi afflicting banana crops. Maasai children in Tanzania examine bovine dung for parasites. An entomologist in the Peruvian Amazon has happened upon an unidentified species of mite. One man catalogues pollen; another tracks his dog's menstrual cycle.

With my Foldscope, I looked at peach flesh, pinkie cuticle, Himalayan sea salt, and grime from a subway pole. (The last of these resembled a Klimt painting stripped of color.) Prakash likes to abet this sort of observation, and he engages in it himself, contributing to Foldscope Explore frequently, even though he has seventy thousand unopened e-mails. A video of his teeth scrapings is there, as are photos of "the

gazillion little things" that sprayed from his mouth one night during a coughing fit.

One of Prakash's interests is biomimicry—understanding how and why certain organisms work so well, and using that knowledge to build new tools. "Plants, insects, tiny bugs under the sink, bacteria, day after day, accomplish things that no scientist anywhere in the world knows how to do," he has said. Among insects alone, about nine hundred thousand species have been named, but millions more remain to be identified and described. The Foldscope increases Prakash's reach. "I now have eyes and ears around the world looking at small things," he told me.

Prakash's hope is that those eyes and ears will make discoveries of their own. He and his chief collaborator on the project, Jim Cybulski, plan to make the Foldscope available for purchase by the summer. Prakash is particularly keen on getting kits to people who live without electricity or modern sanitation, and who have likely never observed the microcosmos directly. In October, India committed to rolling out a countrywide Foldscope program. Prakash is travelling there to demon-

strate the instrument to teachers, students, health-care workers, and forest rangers. (It isn't yet clear how the Foldscope will help the rangers, who are mainly concerned with the survival of the one-horned rhinoceros.) "There's a very deep connection between science education and global health," Prakash told me. "Unless you get people curious about the small-scale world, it's very hard to change mind-sets about diseases."

The idea for the Foldscope crystallized when Prakash was in Thailand, in 2011. "I found myself at a field station that had a really expensive microscope," he said. "Everyone was afraid of it. It was worth five times the salary of the person trying to operate it. It just made no sense, out there in the jungle." Three years later, with a prototype Foldscope in hand, he and Cybulski, who was then his student, went to Nigeria to conduct studies at a malaria research center in Lagos. One day, they drove north from the city to find a school. The students had just finished classes for the day, but Prakash persuaded them to stay so that he could show them the Foldscope. They caught a mosquito that was feeding on one of the children and mounted it on a paper slide, which they inserted into the Foldscope. Prakash passed it to the boy, who raised it to his eye and looked through the lens, using a small L.E.D. (also included in the kit) as his light source. "For the first time, he realized this was his blood, and this little proboscis is how it feeds on his blood," Prakash said. "To make that connection—that literally this is where disease passes on, with this blood, his blood—was an absolutely astounding moment." The exercise had its intended effect. The boy said, "I really should sleep under a bed net."

Prakash sees the Foldscope as his main contribution, so far, to frugal science, the endeavor to create low-cost, easy-to-use tools that address serious problems, primarily in the developing world. In recent years, an increasing number of researchers at elite institutions have devoted their time to such inventions. Among the more ingenious are a centrifuge made from a salad spinner; a method for turning farm waste

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Lung cancer patient at
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into charcoal briquettes using an oil drum; and a solar-powered sterilizer for surgical instruments, built from pocket mirrors and a pressure cooker.

George M. Whitesides, a chemistry professor at Harvard, works at the more complex end of the frugal-science spectrum, in microfluidics. He and his collaborators have created a series of paper-based medical tests, each about the size of a postage stamp. The tests are printed with lines of liquid-repellent wax, which separate a single drop of blood or saliva into small streams. The streams are then drawn across the paper, like red wine on a napkin, and mixed with an array of chemicals to produce a color-coded result. One test diagnoses liver toxicity, a common side effect of treatment for H.I.V., tuberculosis, diabetes, and heart disease. Another is being developed to determine whether a patient has been successfully inoculated against tetanus or measles. This year, a company that Whitesides co-founded registered the liver-toxicity test with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and it has recently started shipping the test overseas.

Inventors of frugal-science tools sometimes have trouble anticipating the problems that they will encounter in the developing world. Early on, Whitesides's group was obliged to change the protective packaging of one of its microfluidics inventions. The test had been designed for use in an air-conditioned American lab, but the Indian lab in which it was being implemented was cooled with ceiling fans. In 2008, Christopher Charles, a Canadian researcher working in Cambodia, met with a similar hurdle. He had been exploring a way to reduce the incidence of iron-deficiency anemia, a serious local health problem, by placing small iron ingots in cooking pots. But Charles had trouble persuading people to use them. When he learned that fish are a symbol of good luck in Cambodia, he redesigned the iron lump as a smiling fish. After that, the ingots were more readily adopted, and the anemia rate fell forty-six per cent.

Prakash is aware of the difficulties inherent in transforming a lab-proven invention into a practical tool. He grew up in India and, as a child, was in-

fectured with latent tuberculosis, like a third of the Indian population. Keeping costs down, he told me, is especially important with the Foldscope. "This one-dollar number is not random," he said. "When something goes from one dollar to ten to one hundred, people will fall off your scale." Another essential element is cultivating a sense of ownership among the people and the organizations using it. "The fact that it's such a modular tool—you can break it apart, you put it together—is very important," he said. He cited the example of the Raspberry Pi, a credit-card-size computer that enables do-it-yourself programming and costs as little as five dollars. Prakash hopes to scale up his invention using aspects of what the Raspberry Pi Foundation has done—"starting small and focussing on the community of users, so that they get the best possible experience."

It isn't clear, though, whether his dreams for the Foldscope will be realized. Whitesides called it "quite a neat idea," with definite promise as an educational tool, but he said that its utility beyond the classroom remained to be seen. (While Prakash and Cybulski were in Lagos, they discovered that the Foldscope, as it was then designed, could not be used to diagnose malaria, because its lens was too simple to reveal the telltale horseshoe-shaped parasite that causes the disease.) Kentaro Toyama, a professor at the University of Michigan School of Information and the author of "Geek Heresy: Rescuing Social Change from the Cult of Technology," was similarly circumspect. He noted that the success of a tool like the Foldscope depends on how its users implement it, something over which Prakash ultimately will have little control. "What allows people to earn more—at least, in our current globalized economy—are skills that the market will pay for," Toyama said. "It's not the innovative tech doing the magic; it's the effort to build human capacity."

A cautionary tale might be that of One Laptop Per Child, a nonprofit founded in 2005. The company's goal was to produce a low-cost, low-energy computer that organizations and the governments of developing nations

could buy and distribute in schools. But teachers often didn't know how to integrate the machines into their lessons, and many struggled with glitchy software. Studies of the laptop's impact in Peru, Nepal, and Uruguay (the only country to buy enough units for all its primary-school students) found that it had no effect on reading or math skills. The company never succeeded in meeting its price point of a hundred dollars. In 2009, it cut its staff by half. Prakash noted that the Foldscope is quite different in concept from a cheap computer—simple, analog, and geared toward experience rather than information—but he praised O.L.P.C. for inciting new ways of thinking. As Wayan Vota, the founder of a Web site that tracked the project in the news until last year, has said, "The first person charging up the hill always gets gunned down."

Manu Prakash's grandfather taught him to swim by throwing him into a canal off the Ganges River in Mawana, the remote sugarcane town where he was born. "It was not all picturesque," Prakash said. "There were fields full of trash." But Mawana was where he first fell in love with insects, especially aquatic ones. He built his first microscope at the age of seven, using his brother's glasses. Three years later, his mother, Sushma, accepted a job teaching political science at a community college in Rampur, five hundred miles away. ("The town is known for the Rampuri *chaku*," Prakash said. "It's a kind of knife—what gangsters use in Bollywood movies.") His father, Brij, stayed behind to run a real-estate business, so Sushma rented an apartment for herself and the two boys.

The previous tenant had been a chemistry teacher. "He was running a science lab in the house, but he didn't pay his rent," Prakash said. "The landlord evicted him, confiscated his lab, and didn't know what to do with it, so he dumped all the equipment in the back." Prakash and his brother developed an interest in combustion; one experiment involved building and then blowing up a ten-foot-tall wire-mesh effigy of Ravana, the Hindu demon king. Other projects were more practical. Xerox had a plant in Rampur, and sponsored

an annual model-making contest. Prakash led teams to victory four years in a row, bringing home the grand prize—a teapot or a box of fine cutlery—to Sushma. His entries included a replica of the Exxon Valdez, the oil tanker that ran aground off the Alaskan coast in 1989, and an anatomically accurate rabbit skeleton made from the stinking corpses of two rabbits. (“They have about as many bones as a human,” Prakash said.) His classmates would approach him a year in advance, asking to be on his Xerox team. “I was the boss, even though I was a foot shorter than everyone,” he said.

At eighteen, Prakash enrolled at the Indian Institute of Technology, in Kanpur, where he majored in computer science. One day in 2001, Neil Gershenfeld, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, came to give a lecture. Two students buttonholed him, expressing interest in continuing their studies in the United States. Gershenfeld discussed their cases with the head of the university. “I thought I was going to take the charming, eloquent, articulate one,” Gershenfeld said. “He advised me to take the other one. That was Manu.”

Prakash arrived at M.I.T. in 2002. He did most of his Ph.D. research at Gershenfeld’s Center for Bits and Atoms, an interdisciplinary program with generous funding and a stable of

manic inventor prodigies—“a place where Manu can be Manu,” as Gershenfeld put it. Prakash made a name for himself in the area of microfluidic bubble logic, by demonstrating that water droplets could be made to store, carry, and process information, as electrons do in a computer circuit. While at the center, he met two people whose work later helped inspire elements of the Foldscope. The first was Erik Demaine, the youngest professor in M.I.T.’s history, who established the field of computational origami. The other was John Bush, a mathematician, who co-authored several papers with Prakash, including two on the feeding mechanism of the red-necked phalarope, an Arctic shorebird. As it eats, the phalarope moves its beak in a rapid tweezing motion, transforming food-laden droplets of water into aspherical shapes that are propelled up into its mouth. Prakash built an artificial version of the beak, which he is now developing to mold polymers into lenses for the Foldscope.

By 2008, he had racked up thousands of dollars in late fees at the library, and M.I.T. refused to grant him a degree. Nevertheless, he was awarded a post at the Harvard Society of Fellows, where he met Sophie Dumont, a biophysicist from Quebec. She loaned him money and her car so that he could return all the books he could find; M.I.T. gave him his Ph.D. Three years

later, in Delhi, he and Dumont got married.

Their life is one of constant work, or constant play, depending on your perspective. She is a professor at the University of California, San Francisco, where she studies the mechanics of cell division. On weekdays, they are both at their labs. On weekends, at home, they work on independent research projects. “The kitchen is a lab now,” Dumont told me. “The dining-room table is a lab. The bathroom is also a lab. Well, it was always a lab.” They are hard pressed to name unscientific forms of leisure. “We don’t know anything about music,” Prakash said one afternoon, over brunch. He was wearing Crocs studded with a little rubber caterpillar and bumblebees, and he had ordered the chili scramble. “The last concert we went to, which was also the first, was Bon Jovi.” His wife corrected him: “Not Bon Jovi. Billy Joel!”

Dumont carries ziplock baggies in her purse to store the specimens that Prakash recovers—a spittlebug from the conifers near their apartment, a winged insect from a chili scramble. His constant Foldscoping, she told me, sometimes invites unwanted attention. On several occasions, he has had to do Foldscope demonstrations for airport security personnel. “At first, when I said they were microscopes, they were, like, ‘What the hell are you talking about?’ ” he said. “Then, by the end, they were so excited.” Dumont mentioned other incidents, like the time Prakash was asked to leave a park in San Francisco after someone reported him for suspicious behavior. “In general, the attitude toward science is not where it needs to be,” he said.

Earlier this year, Prakash took a phone call from his lawyers. He was in his office, beneath Stanford’s Science and Engineering Quad, an expanse of sandstone and Mexican fan palms on the school’s central campus. Although his lab was brand new, it already looked well used. The black countertops were covered with flotsam—pliers, tubes, clamps, an aquarium filled with light corn syrup. In Prakash’s office, a dead sea sponge sat on a table, like a big glob of soap foam.



The lawyers wanted to know what he was calling the independent company that would oversee the scaling up of Foldscope manufacturing and, eventually, other frugal-science tools. They also wanted a mission statement. Prakash floundered. “One sentence that explains everything we’re doing!” he said.

In the lab, Laurel Kroo, a mechanical-engineering student, was researching the compound eyes of fossilized trilobites, a group of extinct marine arthropods, in the hope of improving the Foldscope’s lens design. Haripriya Mukundarajan, another mechanical engineer, was elbow-deep in a translucent box of live mosquitoes. With Prakash, she is working on an early-warning system for disease outbreaks. It uses a postcard that is covered in beads of chemical gel, which hungry mosquitoes mistake for human flesh. As the insects feed on the gel, they leave behind traces of whatever pathogens they are carrying—malaria, for instance, or the dengue virus. “When they bite you, they are essentially spitting into you,” Mukundarajan said. Volunteers leave the postcards outdoors for a week, then drop them in a mailbox to send them to a lab. Prakash and Mukundarajan are planning to set up the first field study, in Kenya, next year.

Another student, George Korir, was working on a prototype for a five-dollar hand-cranked chemistry set. Its base is a Kikkerland music box, which works like a player piano, with songs encoded on perforated rolls of paper. In Korir’s adapted version, the perforations tell the box what chemicals to dispense—each note prompts a pump of liquid. Given the right perforations and chemicals, it can detect contamination in water or soil. Korir, who is from Kenya and has been at Prakash’s lab since 2012, is also experimenting with ways to use the box to test for malaria in remote areas. (So far, he hasn’t been successful.)

Prakash and the lawyers concluded their phone call without settling on a name or a mission statement. He began filling a cardboard box with equipment for an experiment at home—coils of black rubber tubing, a vacuum pump—and then, noticing the time, he called,

“Who wants to play soccer?” and rushed out the door. The lab’s Friday game had already started.

At the field, I sat on the sidelines under a mulberry tree with Jim Cybulski, who has done more Foldscope studies overseas than any other member of Prakash’s lab, including Prakash. He looked exhausted. He was defending his dissertation, on frugal science, in a few weeks, and had recently returned from Kenya, where he had been experimenting with a new Foldscope adapted for diagnostics. He said that there had been problems with the original Foldscope when he had used it to screen for schistosomiasis in Ghana, in 2014. The illness, which affects more than two hundred million people worldwide, is caused by parasitic flatworms. Their eggs are detectable with a Foldscope, in urine samples, but it had been too difficult to try to prevent contamination, Cybulski said, and too tiring on the eyes to squint through a pinhole all day long. The new medical Foldscope, which would cost ten dollars, included a built-in projector, so that a team of health workers could view a slide together, without bringing it near their faces. Cybulski’s results from the Kenya test had revealed that fifty-four children, about half the study group, were infected with schistosomiasis, but he reported this as hopeful news. “With a diagnosis, now they will get treated,” he said.

Cybulski is sometimes obliged to play Sancho Panza to Prakash’s Don Quixote. Although Prakash likes to rhapsodize about how a Foldscope kit is the best way to teach germ theory, it can be difficult to see anything much smaller than two microns in size with the standard lens, and bacteria often measure less than one micron. Last year, at a school in Tanzania, Cybulski persuaded the director of a sanitation-and-hygiene program not to have students use the Foldscope to look for microbes on their hands. He worried that the children would fail to see anything, and that this might lead them to conclude that their hands were perfectly clean. (This is less of a concern when the sample is of something with

a greater density of bacteria, like, in some cases, dental plaque.) At the same school, Cybulski noted another problem: the teachers treated the Foldsopes as precious, fragile objects, collecting them from students after each classroom use—the opposite of what he and Prakash had intended.

The sun disappeared behind the mountains and the scrimmage ended. Prakash came running over, holding something. “Wait until you see this,” he said. “Do you have your Foldscope?” I got mine out. He placed a tiny object on one of my slides, inserted it under the lens, and handed the device to me. I held it up to my eye.

“What do you think it is?” he asked.

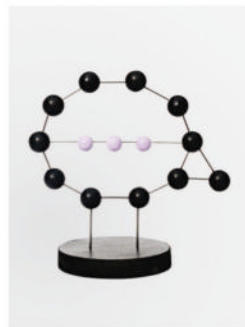
Unmagnified, it might have been a grain of sea salt. But, when the illuminated circle came into view, so did a ghostly, elongated skull, swaddled in a bundle of bent, silvery stalks. The word “unsprung” came to mind.

“I’m still looking. I see lots of legs. Is it a spider egg?”

“You’re close,” Prakash said. “It’s definitely an arthropod. Let’s look at it together.” He attached my Foldscope to his phone with the magnets, precisely aligned the lenses, and turned on his camera.

“There’s something really incredible here,” he said, as the image came into focus. Cybulski leaned over to see. Prakash panned slowly across the creature. “It’s a baby ant,” he said. “This is where ants come from. That’s the gut. Those are the legs. We can watch it develop into a real ant, right here.”

We didn’t wait around. Prakash was late for a date with Dumont. As we made our way back to the lab, he pointed out a parade of ants crossing our path. They were most likely not moving house, he said, since none of them were carrying larvae in their mouths. He crouched down to study them. Then, remembering that he was in a hurry, he stood up and walked on. ♦



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Video: A look at the microscopic world with Manu Prakash.

NEGOTIATING THE WHIRLWIND

Can Secretary of State John Kerry break through in Syria?

BY DAVID REMNICK

John Kerry, the sixty-eighth Secretary of State of the United States, was born to a temperament of wintry rectitude. He is descended from the Winthrops, who helped found the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and the Forbeses, a Brahmin clan that made its money in railways and in exporting tea, silver, and opium to China. His father was a diplomat. Kerry attended St. Paul's and Yale (where he was in *Skull and Bones*) and, as a naval officer in Vietnam, earned three Purple Hearts, the Bronze Star, and the Silver Star. He dated Jacqueline Kennedy's half-sister, sailed with J.F.K., and married twice into substantial fortunes. Despite the codes of his class, however, Kerry was never entirely subtle about his ambitions. When he was in prep school, his classmates used to play "Hail to the Chief" to him on the kazoo.

In 2004, when Kerry lost the Presidential race to George W. Bush, who is widely considered the worst President of the modern era, he refused to challenge the results, despite his suspicion that in certain states, particularly Ohio, where the Electoral College count hinged, proxies for Bush had rigged many voting machines. But he could not suffer the defeat in complete silence. He was outraged that Bush, who had won a state-side berth in the Texas Air National Guard during the Vietnam War, used campaign surrogates, the so-called Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, to slime his military record. He was furious, too, at Robert Shrum, his chief strategist, and other campaign advisers who had restrained him from hitting back.

"For a long period, after 2004, every time he even half fell asleep all he saw was voting machines in the state of Ohio," Mike Barnicle, a close friend of Kerry's and a former columnist for the Boston *Globe*, told me. This summer, Barnicle spent time with Kerry on Nantucket, where Kerry and his wife,

Teresa Heinz, have a house on the water and a seventy-six-foot, seven-million-dollar sailboat called Isabel. "We were sitting in the bow," Barnicle recalled, "and we were talking about a bunch of different things—about Iran, about what the President of Iran was like—and I said, 'Other than not being President, this is pretty good.' There was a security boat sailing off to the side of us. Then he said, 'Yeah, yeah, I realize how badly Shrum screwed me.'"

A few weeks ago, between Kerry's trips to Europe and the Middle East, I had dinner with Kerry and Heinz at their house in Georgetown, a twenty-three-room mansion decorated with Early American portraits, Dutch still-lives, and an amiable yellow Labrador retriever named Ben. (The Lab has the Twitter handle @DiploMutt.) I asked Kerry how long he carried around a sense of anger and resentment.

"I didn't carry it," he insisted. "I didn't. I *didn't*. My wife was mad at me that I didn't carry it longer."

From across the table, Teresa Heinz said, "I'm *still* carrying it."

The Secretary of State looked up from his halibut. An ill wind of panic swept the oblong plain of his face. From the thick thatch of gray hair to the improbably long and thrusting chin, Kerry's visage is immense and, in its implacable resting expression, resembles one of the monolithic heads that rise from the loam of Easter Island.

"Well, I'm not," Kerry said.

His gaze turned to his wife, wordlessly imploring her to keep quiet. Heinz is seventy-seven, five years older than her husband, and, in 2013, she suffered a seizure that she has attributed to an earlier concussion "that was not properly treated at all." It's not easy for her to get around, and she appears infrequently at public events, but she spoke clearly and ardently throughout the evening, much as she had during the 2004 campaign.

She was not quite done. "I knew from looking at the..."

Kerry uses many terms of endearment for his wife; now he called her by the telegraphic "T."

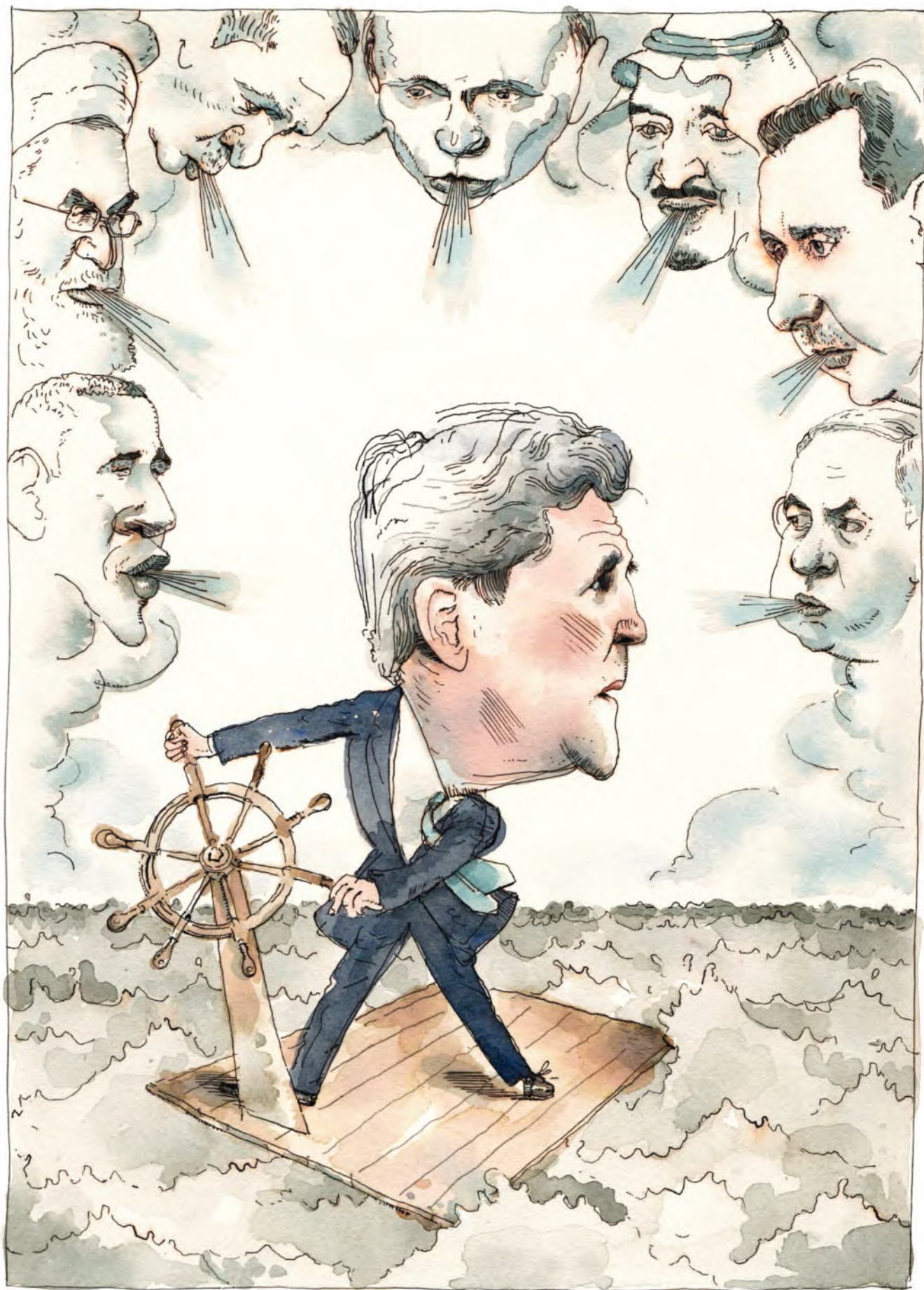
"T, let's not go..." he said gently.

As she tried to speak again, he shut it down.

"T, T, we're not... I didn't want to spend time there," he said. "I just consciously did not spend time there, and I moved on, and I moved on as rapidly as... It's over. It's behind me.... I could have done some things a little bit differently. We didn't. But I'm not going to feel regret the rest of my life."

In early 2013, after twenty-eight years in the Senate, Kerry succeeded Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State. He is seventy-two, and this is almost surely his last high-ranking job as a public official. As he put it to me, "I have fourteen months left on the clock." He has already made his historical mark by acting as the Obama Administration's chief negotiator in the nuclear talks with Iran. That deal, which is designed to prevent Iran from building an atomic weapon and sparking a nuclear arms race throughout the Middle East, was signed two months ago. But it was never a foregone conclusion. This time last year, the White House was running "Plan B" meetings about what steps to take—deeper sanctions, potential military strikes—if the talks failed.

His admirers and his critics in the diplomatic world describe Kerry in similar terms: tirelessly optimistic, dogged, rhetorically undisciplined, undaunted by risk, convinced that if he can just get "the relevant parties" into "the room" he can make a deal. "John Kerry picks his battles, and he invests body and soul in tackling conflicts where the human consequences are very high," Samantha Power, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations,



"His optimism is such that he thinks, We will confront this!" one official said of Kerry's attitude. "There's got to be a solution."

told me. "When he engages, he is all in."

Kerry has shown repeatedly that he will use any lever as a means of diplomatic persuasion—including his defeat in 2004.

In July, 2014, Afghanistan faced a potential civil war as the candidates to succeed Hamid Karzai as President—Abdullah Abdullah, a physician and the former foreign minister, and Ashraf Ghani, the former chancellor of Kabul University—charged each other with trying to steal the election. A few years earlier, Kerry, serving as Obama's emissary while still in the Senate, had talked Karzai down from reckless decisions by recalling his own political upheavals; now he needed to do something similar.

On July 12th, Abdullah met with Kerry, in Kabul, at the American Ambassador's residence. Abdullah's supporters in the Northern Alliance and among various warlords—Ghani had his own warlord constituency—did not want him to back down. It was left to Kerry to argue that, despite what was delicately described as "electoral improprieties," confrontation had to be avoided.

"I ran for President and I lost and now I'm Secretary of State of the most powerful country in the world," Kerry told Abdullah and his entourage, according to an aide's contemporaneous notes. "I know your anger. I know your frustration." He pressed Abdullah not to walk away from politics, lest the country tumble into chaos and "the next generation" lose its chance.

The United Nations carried out an audit of the election and determined that although there had been fraud on both sides, Ghani had won. Abdullah was still not prepared to yield. On September 17th, Kerry called Abdullah from his office at the State Department to persuade him to concede and accept the face-saving position of "chief executive officer" in Ghani's government.

He asked Abdullah to put his phone on speaker so that his aides could hear. After flattering Abdullah for his strength and importance in the country, Kerry said, "I will share with you

a very personal experience: When I ran for President of the United States, in 2004, against George Bush, in the end, on Election Day, we had problems in the state of Ohio on how the votes were taking place. I even went to court in America to keep polling places open to make sure my people could vote. I knew that even in my

country, the United States, where we had hundreds of years of practicing democracy, we still had problems carrying out that election. The next afternoon, I had a meeting with my people, and I told them that I did not think it appropriate of me to take the country through three or four

months of not knowing who the President was. So that afternoon in Boston I conceded to the President and talked about the need to bring the country together. . . . One of the main lessons from this is there is a future. There is a tomorrow."

Several days later, Abdullah Abdullah conceded and joined the Afghan government.

Kerry and Heinz have no shortage of residences; in addition to the houses in Georgetown and on Nantucket, they live in an eighteenth-century five-story pile on Louisburg Square, in Beacon Hill; in a family compound on Naushon, a private island off Cape Cod; in a fifteenth-century English farmhouse that was reassembled on the bank of Big Wood River, in Sun Valley; and on a ninety-acre farm called Rosemont, outside Pittsburgh, where Heinz spent time with her first husband, H. John Heinz III, the Republican senator and condiments scion, who died in 1991. When Kerry ran for President, her fortune was estimated at around a billion dollars. Kerry and Heinz keep their financial assets separate, but, had Kerry won in 2004, they would, together, have been the wealthiest family ever to occupy the White House.

As Secretary of State, however, Kerry spends much of his life onboard a worse-for-wear government jet, a Boeing 757. Both Kerry and Clinton have often had the humbling experience of the plane

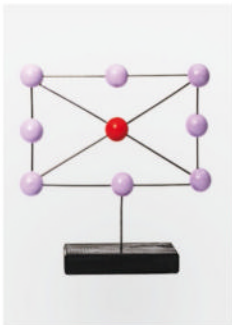
breaking down: a blown tire, a leak in an auxiliary fuel tank, "electronic problems."

Kerry is six-four and walks with a pained roll in his gait. He has had both hips replaced—his ice-hockey days at Yale took a toll—and he is still recovering from an accident last May, in which he steered his racing bike into a curb, crashed to the road, and shattered his right femur. He travels in a cabin in the front of the plane, where a couch unfolds into a bed, allowing him to stretch out to read briefing papers and to make calls on a secure telephone line to foreign leaders and to the White House. He doesn't sleep much, but sometimes he brings along a nylon-string guitar and relaxes by playing Beatles songs, Spanish laments, and show tunes. (Argentina will be delighted to hear that "Evita" is a favorite.) When he's on one of his diplomatic "death marches" through some rarely visited region—recently, it was five Central Asian nations in two days—he likes to bone up with a "crash course."

"I usually Google a country, find an interesting article or two, read about it, get some history," he told me. "I want to know where I am. I want to know what made this place like it is. What is it about Samarkand that's special?"

In late October, I joined him on one of the death marches, a Thursday-to-Sunday trip from Andrews Air Force Base, outside D.C., to Berlin, Vienna, Amman, and Riyadh. His job is to give strategic advice, help execute White House policy, tamp down crises, and reach agreements; to stroke allies, send clear signals to powers considered more problematic, like Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and China; and to forge potential relationships with old enemies like Iran.

The Obama Administration, working in the political safe haven of a second term, has won two recent, if divisive, victories: the deal with Iran and the opening to Cuba. It also has a "bucket list": reaching a ceasefire and political settlement in Syria; stepping up an internationally coordinated fight against ISIS; and advancing the fight against climate change. This trip was designed mainly to get wildly disparate parties from the West, Russia, and the Middle East to begin negotiations on Syria. In particular, the trick was to get Iran "in the room" without losing its sworn



enemies, the Sunni nations of the Gulf.

Kerry's persistence and self-assurance, coupled with excruciating economic sanctions, is what helped him succeed with the Iranians. It's also what led to nine months of fruitless, chaotic, and, arguably, corrosive negotiations that broke down last year between the Israelis and the Palestinians—negotiations that almost no one, not even the President, believed would lead to a breakthrough. Kerry argued that the hellbound trajectory of events was heading toward calamity, and he had to try; his critics said that the conditions were not ripe, and that the effort amounted to a diplomatic vanity project. Kerry's Middle East adventure was precisely the kind of initiative that Hillary Clinton, who was intent on running for President, and who is, by nature, more risk averse, was disinclined to take up as Secretary of State.

The President has admired Kerry's energy and sense of commitment since they worked together on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, although, a number of sources told me, he occasionally ribs Kerry for his more headlong efforts. And yet the two have markedly different temperaments and views of what the United States should attempt to achieve, particularly in the Middle East. Obama sees the region in the throes of historical turmoil—Sunni versus Shia, civil war in Syria, threats to national boundaries drawn by France and Great Britain a century ago, threats to the stability of Lebanon, Jordan, even Saudi Arabia. Having seen one intervention after another fail, he is determined to act with restraint. "Kerry, on the other hand, sees no historical trends that can defeat us," Philip Gordon, a veteran National Security Council official and Obama's principal adviser on the Middle East from 2013 to the spring of 2015, told me. "His optimism is such that he thinks, We will confront this! We will deal with it! There's *got* to be a solution. We just need to find it and lead people there." Gordon does not say this with admiration.

We landed at a military airport in Berlin. Kerry got into an Embassy car and headed to a meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who happened to be in Ger-

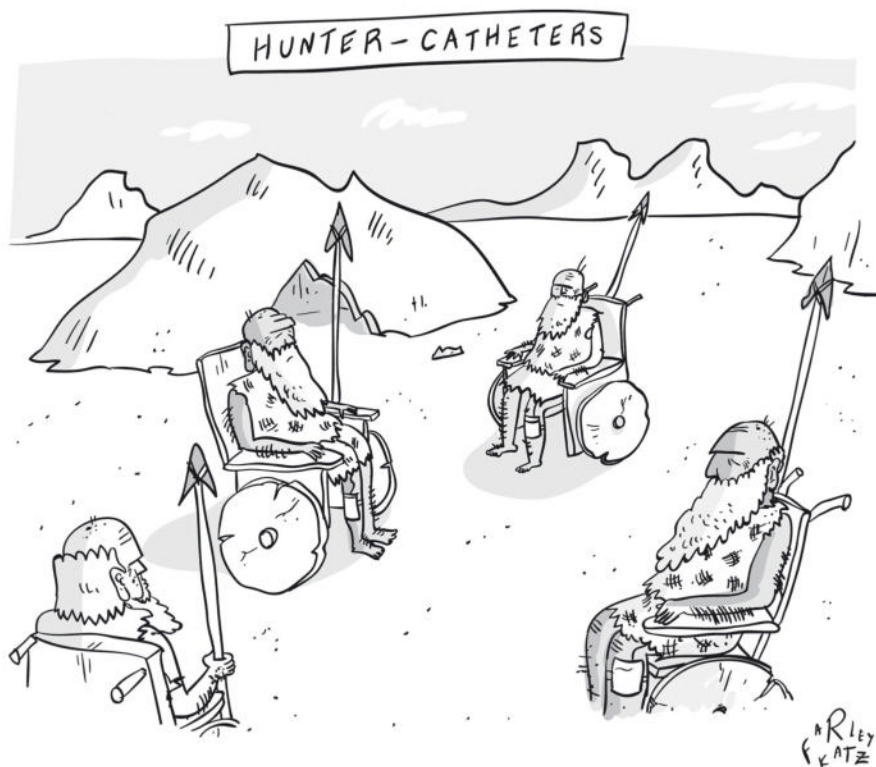
many to see Chancellor Angela Merkel. In recent weeks, there had been an alarming uptick in street violence in Jerusalem and the West Bank—stabbing, shootings, rock throwing, face-offs with troops—and at least some of it was due to rumors that the Israelis wanted to exert more control over the Temple Mount, in the Old City, or what Arabs call the Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary. Some Israelis on the religious right want to build a Third Temple there; some Arabs claim, wrongly, that the site, now dominated by the Al Aqsa Mosque, never had any Jewish historical importance.

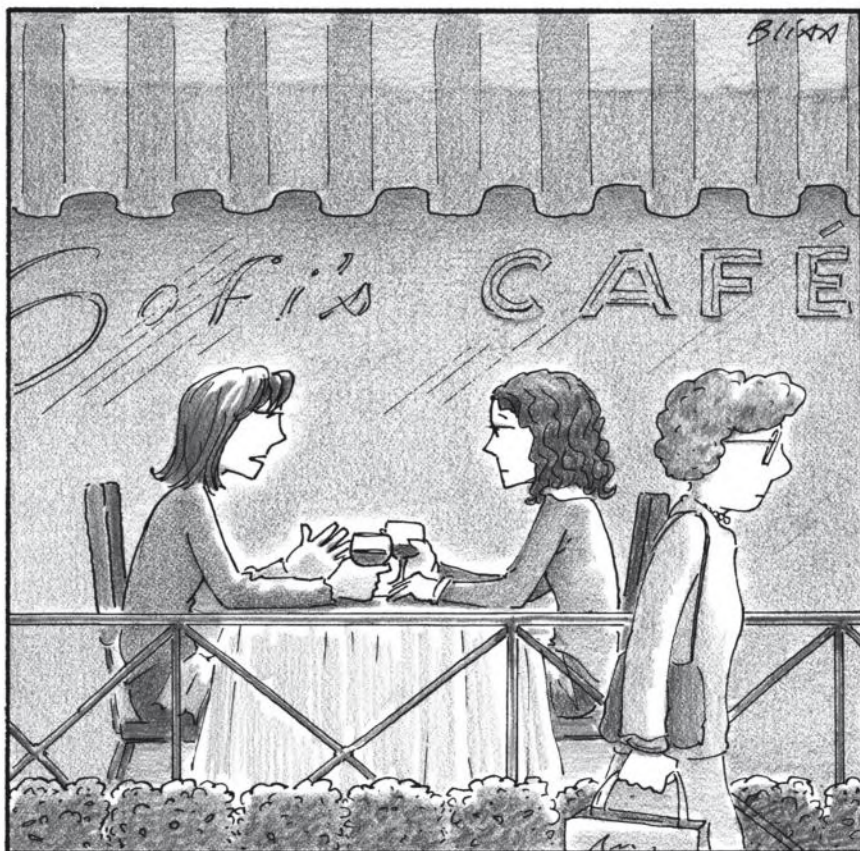
Kerry met with Netanyahu with the modest goal of dialling back the rhetoric about the Temple Mount on both sides, getting the Israelis to make it clear that the complex status quo was not going to change. But Netanyahu had just infuriated him by giving a speech suggesting that the grand mufti of Jerusalem in the thirties was the ideological inspiration for the Final Solution. "Hitler didn't want to exterminate the Jews at the time," Netanyahu told the World Zionist Congress, in late October. "He wanted to expel the Jews." Netanyahu said the mufti didn't want German Jews to come to Palestine, so, instead, he advised Hitler to "burn

them." The mufti was, in fact, anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi, but the notion that he was the ideologist of the Holocaust was preposterous.

Although Netanyahu "clarified" his comments on the mufti before arriving in Berlin, Kerry's circle did not see the performance as an aberration. Most of the ministers in Netanyahu's cabinet are on the record opposing a two-state solution. American officials speak of Netanyahu as myopic, entitled, untrustworthy, routinely disrespectful toward the President, and focussed solely on short-term political tactics to keep his right-wing constituency in line. Netanyahu seems not to care if he insults the Administration. Ron Dermer, his ambassador to the U.S., secretly arranged with John Boehner for Netanyahu to speak before Congress without alerting the White House; Danny Danon, his envoy to the U.N., blamed Obama's "lack of leadership" for Turkish and Iranian aggression; and Ran Baratz, whom Netanyahu appointed last month as his media chief, wrote on his Facebook page that the President was anti-Semitic and that Kerry had the mental abilities of a twelve-year-old.

Kerry sometimes speaks vaguely of trying yet again to forge an Israeli-Palestinian settlement—"There are





"Lately, I feel like the only time I have to myself is when I'm having sex with Brian."

worse things than getting caught trying"—but his last attempt left him badly disillusioned. His public comments now make it clear that only if Israel and the Palestinians come knocking will he get involved in a negotiation. In 2014, as Kerry shuttled from capital to capital, one Israeli cabinet minister told me, "We are only doing this for you!" Moshe Ya'alon, Netanyahu's defense minister, was quoted in the Israeli press saying, "The only thing that can 'save us' is for John Kerry to win a Nobel Prize and leave us in peace." Kerry, Ya'alon said, "turned up here determined and acting out of misplaced obsession and messianic fervor."

The relationship further soured when Netanyahu brought his campaign against the Iran nuclear deal to the floor of the U.S. Congress. "The frustration with the Israelis on a lot of issues has been sky-high," one senior U.S. official told me, characterizing the mood at both the White House and the State De-

partment. American officials are frustrated in various ways with the Palestinians as well, but, as the official said, "they don't have any power in this dynamic. The Israelis have all the cards."

As a diplomat, Kerry is duty-bound to describe raw reality in upholstered platitudes. And so, after his long session in Berlin with Netanyahu, he said, in a voice that had been rendered a scratchy whisper by too many hours of talking, that the meeting left him "cautiously encouraged." He hoped to "resolve age-old differences in a frozen conflict." He wanted the "parties" to "pull back from the precipice" and go down a "road that takes people somewhere." And so on.

State Department aides said that sources of Kerry's exasperation with Netanyahu range from the injustice of settlement building in the West Bank to the way he employs Yitzhak Molcho, his lawyer and confidant, to stifle even the most inconsequential negotiation.

Kerry's special envoy Frank Lowenstein told me that Kerry will "play through the whistle," and persist with the Israelis and the Palestinians until the end of his time in office, but he added, "The window for a two-state solution is closing, though none of us who've worked on it will regret that we tried to save it."

Kerry believes that Israel, along with the occupied territories, is headed toward becoming a "unitary state that is an impossible entity to manage." He is particularly concerned, he said, that the Palestinian Authority could collapse; that, in the event, the P.A.'s thirty thousand security officers would scatter; and that chaos and increasingly violent clashes with Israel would follow.

"I understand the passions that are behind all of this—I get it," Kerry told me. "If it were easy, it would have been done a long time ago. I happen to believe there is a way forward. There's a solution. It would be good for Israel; it'd be great for the Palestinians; it'd be great for the region. People would make so much money. There'd be so many jobs created. There could be peace. And you would be stronger for it. Because nobody that I know or have met in the West Bank is anxious to have jihadis come in."

"The alternative is you sit there and things just get worse," Kerry went on. "There will be more Hezbollah. There will be more rockets. And they'll all be pointed in one direction. And there will be more people on the border. And what happens then? You're going to be one big fortress? I mean, that's not a way to live. It seems to me it is far more intelligent and far more strategic—which is an important word here—to have a theory of how you are going to preserve the Jewish state and be a democracy and a beacon to the world that everybody envisioned when Israel was created."

I asked him if he could imagine an end to the State of Israel.

"No, I don't believe that's going to happen," he said. "It's just, What is it going to be like, is the question. Will it be a democracy? Will it be a Jewish state? Or will it be a unitary state with two systems, or some draconian treatment of Palestinians, because to let them vote would be to dilute the Jewish state? I don't know. I have no answer to that. But the problem is, neither do they. Neither do the people who

are supposed to be providing answers to this. It is not an answer to simply continue to build in the West Bank and to destroy the homes of the other folks you're trying to make peace with and pretend that that's a solution."

In the evening, Kerry flew from Berlin to Vienna, where, in meetings with his Russian, Turkish, and Saudi counterparts, the focus would turn to Syria. Some of the reporters on the State Department beat recall with nostalgia a time when Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice regularly came to the back of the plane to brief them, often on the record. Kerry is prone to senatorial over-talk and the occasional gaffe; recently, he had to walk back an infelicitous statement that there was a "rationale" to the murders of the *Charlie Hebdo* staff, as opposed to the more recent attacks in Paris. White House officials have made it clear that his bouts of verbal indiscipline are unwelcome, and his trips to the back of the plane are less frequent. Recently, at the Saban Forum, a Middle East conference in Washington, D.C., Martin Indyk, Kerry's former aide, interviewed him onstage and began by saying, with a smile, that he would be the only one asking questions, because Kerry's staffers "were worried about your answers."

The State Department beat is trying. The reporters are sardined into the back of the plane for endless flights and, upon arrival, spend hours waiting in hotel and airport holding rooms, interrupted by bursts of stenography. While Kerry met with Sergei Lavrov, his Russian counterpart, at the Hotel Imperial, we pecked at the birdseed of the pool report, a couple of precisely quoted non-quotes. The pool reporter concluded with this plaintive note: "That's it. My recorder was running for a total of twenty-two seconds."

But the talks were of real significance. Kerry was trying to persuade his interlocutors, especially the Saudis, of the wisdom of including Iran, which has worked with the Russians to prop up Assad, in future talks. The developments in Syria were clear enough: at least two hundred thousand dead, four million refugees, millions more displaced. The regime—backed by Iranian troops, Hezbollah guerrillas, Russian air strikes on

rebel outposts, and support from the Iraqi Shiite militias—has regained its footing and maintains a hold over up to two-thirds of the population. ISIS is under increasing attack from coalition air strikes and Kurdish ground troops, but it has moved the fight abroad.

The dispiriting reality of American foreign policy in the twenty-first century has been neatly summarized in *Politico* by Philip Gordon, the former N.S.C. official: "In Iraq, the U.S. intervened and occupied, and the result was a costly disaster. In Libya, the U.S. intervened and did not occupy, and the result was a costly disaster. In Syria, the U.S. neither intervened nor occupied, and the result is a costly disaster." Some foreign-policy experts, from Leon Panetta, the former C.I.A. director, to Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, predict that the conflicts that have emerged from the Arab uprisings will lead to a "Thirty Years' War," a protracted, regional bloodletting reminiscent of the religious wars in Central Europe that began with the fragmentation of the Holy Roman Empire, in 1618.

The violent swirl of uncertainties brings out the President's native caution. The most consequential political act of Obama's early career was a brief appearance, in 2002, at an antiwar demonstration in Federal Plaza, in downtown Chicago, where he declared that the impending invasion of Iraq was "dumb" and would "require a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences." That speech set him apart from both Kerry and Clinton, who, as senators, voted to give Bush the right to use force in Iraq, and it set the ideological template for his foreign policy, not least on Syria. Vali Nasr, a former State Department adviser to Hillary Clinton and Richard Holbrooke, told me, "Obama hasn't changed his position from 2011. He is always concerned that it's a fool's errand, a slippery slope to another Iraq, pouring blood and treasure into another conflict."

Kerry's senior aides are not hesitant to say that both as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and as Secretary of State he has disagreed strongly with Obama on Syria. "Obama prioritizes avoiding any entanglements where it is uncertain that such an in-

tervention will work," a State Department official told me. Kerry, who sees that the crisis has threatened the stability of Jordan, Lebanon, and other states in the region and has provided ISIS with a base, in Raqqa and Ramadi, has, the official said, "much more faith in our ability to avoid a slippery slope."

From the beginning of the civilian uprisings in Syria, in 2011, and the regime's escalating and bloody reaction, many of Obama's advisers have argued for a more aggressive policy: arming and funding the "moderate rebels"; air strikes on Damascus; taking out Assad's helicopters and planes, which drop barrel bombs packed with shrapnel, explosives, and, sometimes, chlorine; the establishment of safe zones and a no-fly zone. In 2012, the C.I.A. director, David Petraeus; the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Martin Dempsey; Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta; Samantha Power, who was then a national-security adviser; and Secretary of State Clinton pressed Obama to support vetted rebels against the regime. Kerry—who was influenced by the relatively successful, if belated, interventions in the Balkans, in the nineties, and also by the calamitous decision not to intervene in Rwanda in 1994—joined this chorus when he replaced Clinton. But no one could convince Obama that deeper involvement would avoid a repetition of the Iraq fiasco.

Kerry was a critical actor in the most humbling episode of the Syrian drama. Obama had warned Assad that he would be crossing a "red line" if he used chemical weapons, saying that such an act would "change my calculus." In August, 2013, a year after the "red line" warning, Assad's forces, according to Western intelligence services and an independent U.N. commission, fired rockets armed with sarin on Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus, killing hundreds. The U.S. prepared to attack with cruise missiles. In a speech insisting that Assad give up all his chemical arms, Kerry referred to the "lessons" of the Holocaust and of Rwanda. General Dempsey said, "Our finger was on the trigger." Obama warned of an American attack, although Kerry, following the President's minimizing lead, allowed that the strike would be "unbelievably small." Then, without consulting Kerry, Obama stepped back, saying that he would have to get congressional

approval before an attack on Syria. He had concluded that it was worse to go to war than to be seen as weak.

Obama's aides say that the debates over Syria are always over the cost of an action versus the cost of inaction. Ben Rhodes, a deputy national-security adviser, told me, "The President has spent more time on Syria than on any other issue in the Situation Room, often testing different theories and propositions. But no one has ever been able to answer the second and third questions: If you do X, then what? If you were to take more assertive military action against Assad, what happens the day after, when Assad is still in place and we have not engaged militarily even more robustly? There's an expectation to see it through. There is an escalatory logic that leads the U.S. to take responsibility for Syria. He's open to different proposals, but where do they lead?"

When I spoke with President Obama last year, he made a similar point. "It is very difficult to imagine a scenario in which our involvement in Syria would have led to a better outcome, short of us being willing to undertake an effort in size and scope similar to what we did in Iraq," he said. "And when I hear people suggesting that somehow if we had just financed and armed the opposition earlier, that somehow Assad would be gone by now and we'd have a peaceful transition, it's magical thinking."

Nearly everyone I talked to in the Administration considered the "red line" aftermath to be a diplomatic fiasco. The Syrian government did, however, give up its main chemical stockpiles when its ally Russia stepped in and pressured it to do so. Sergei Lavrov, the foreign minister, worked with Kerry to close the deal. Meanwhile, Assad remains in power. The Administration, which started out saying that he must step aside, is now willing to see Assad play a transitional role in a political settlement before leaving the stage at an undetermined point. As one abashed U.S. official told me, "The meaning of 'Assad has to go' has evolved."

So has Kerry's view of Assad. In 2010, before the Arab uprisings, Kerry met several times with Assad in Damascus, at Obama's request. The Administration wanted Kerry to see what

kind of Syrian-Israeli agreement he could help forge. Assad expressed concern that the economic isolation of Syria, and its crippling unemployment, was building up enormous strain and that the regime could fall to a fundamentalist-led revolt. Walid Muallem, Assad's foreign minister, told one of Kerry's aides, "If we don't succeed in opening up our economy, you'll come back here in ten years and you'll meet with *Mullah* Assad."

Assad told Kerry that, in order to make peace with Israel, he had to get back the Golan Heights, territory lost in the 1967 war. For that to be considered, Kerry replied, Syria would have to cease the transit of arms through Syria to Hezbollah, in Lebanon, and to Hamas, in Gaza.

"We basically delivered him a pretty strong message of, 'You better stop this or else,'" Kerry told me. "But I also engaged with him, because he wanted to talk about another subject—a relationship with Israel in the future. I don't think I've ever talked about this publicly, but he was ready to make a deal with Israel. And the proof of that is a letter I still have that he wrote and signed proposing a structure by which he was willing to recognize Israel, have an embassy there, make peace, deal with the Golan, et cetera." (A representative of the Syrian government denied that Assad ever wrote such a let-



ter; he also denied that Assad took any oppressive measures in 2011.) Syria asked Kerry for economic assistance, including a pipeline to Iraq and aid for technology and health care. When Netanyahu was told of the discussions, he was reluctant. "Bibi came to Washington, and one of the first things out of his mouth in the Oval Office was 'I can't do this. I'm not going to—I just can't.'"

The issue was rendered moot in

March, 2011, when the revolution began in Syria. As the Syrian regime increased its level of cruelty from month to month—beginning with the police torturing young protesters and moving on to the indiscriminate killing of many thousands, using barrel bombs—all talk of the "soft-spoken British-educated ophthalmologist," of Assad as the reformist hope of Syria, was eclipsed.

Kerry shook his head at the memory of it. At dinner in Damascus, Assad had told Kerry and Heinz about how his mother could no longer go to a local mosque dressed in a skirt. He talked about how female college classmates, professional women, were now in hijab. "We want to be a secular country," Assad said, according to Kerry. "We don't want to be inundated by this."

Kerry went on, "I had an impression that this guy had serious business plans, growth plans, development plans, wanted to change." When I pressed him to describe Assad in terms of his crimes, he backed off. "You know what? I want to try to talk common sense to him through this process, and I do not want to get into any—it's just the inappropriate moment for me to..."

Both Kerry and Heinz said they had heard from their Syrian sources that Assad's mother or his brother, Maher al-Assad, the family enforcer figure and an Army general who commands the elite Fourth Armored Division and the Republican Guard, urged Bashar to crack down hard on the protesters; otherwise, the family and the Alawite regime were finished. Kerry thinks of Assad as the toxic product of his family and his political environment, a kind of rational autocrat who set out to reform his country but, when faced with the prospect of joining the list of deposed Arab dictators, acted in the predictably monstrous way of his father, who, in 1982, slaughtered twenty thousand people in the city of Hama to put down a Muslim Brotherhood uprising.

Assad, Kerry said, "made enormous, gigantic mistakes, and I think they are disqualifying mistakes." Kerry continues to use bloodless terms like "mistakes" because he hopes he will soon be dealing with Assad—either through Russia and Iran or through the media, or even a negotiating team from Damascus. Either way, his job, as he sees

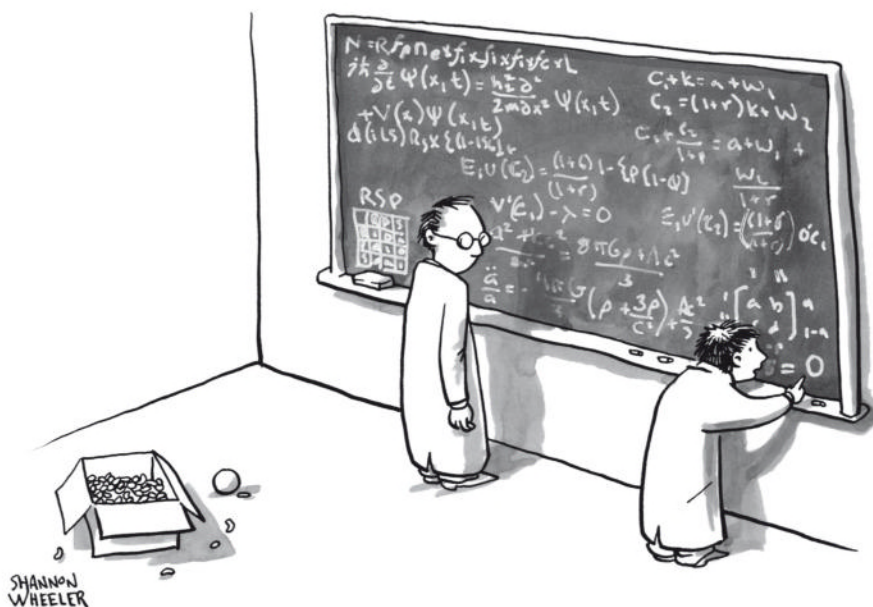
it, is to persuade. The American position is still that Assad must go, but, in order to keep Russia and Iran in the discussion, Obama and Kerry have fudged the question of when.

"I believe Syria can be put back together still," Kerry told me. "But I think this is the last shot to try to do it. I think that if you can't do this it could break up into enclaves and Iraq could—I mean, you could see a lot of things happen. This is not the Thirty Years' War today. But, if allowed to fester unabated by the peace process or by a solution, this could become a kind of Thirty Years' War, because it could develop into a bona-fide, full-fledged Sunni-Shia conflagration."

Vienna is a scene of satisfaction for Kerry. It is where he signed documents for a nuclear settlement with Mohammed Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister. Obama had ramped up economic sanctions and launched cyber attacks against Iran well before Kerry joined the Administration, but when Kerry was still a senator he was involved in a series of secret American-Iranian meetings, brokered by Sultan Qaboos bin Said, of Oman, which prepared the way.

The tension in the negotiating rooms was sometimes unbearable. Opposition to the talks raged from Jerusalem to Capitol Hill, and Zarif made it known, both as a tactic and as a matter of fact, that he faced immense pressure in Tehran from hard-liners who wanted to break off negotiations. "The subtext all along was possible war," the State Department official told me. It was discussed openly. During one exchange in Lausanne, when the two sides were arguing over Fordow, a secret underground uranium-enrichment site, Kerry asked, "Why do you care so much? You have facilities elsewhere."

Zarif said that the Fordow installation, which was built under a mountain near the city of Qom, was an insurance policy in case Israel or the United States attacked Iran's other sites. Kerry replied, "I don't want to be crude about it, but that won't save you." The Americans in the room knew that Kerry was referring to a thirty-thousand-pound bomb called the Massive Ordnance Penetrator, which is capable



"You're right—the shipping isn't free. They've folded the expense into the cost of the item."

of destroying a facility like Fordow.

The agreement could, in time, collapse if Iran is caught violating it, but Obama and Kerry were making a bet that they could both prevent a nuclear Iran and empower more modern elements in the Iranian élites who may, after the passing of Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, and his hard-line cadre of ayatollahs, liberalize the regime.

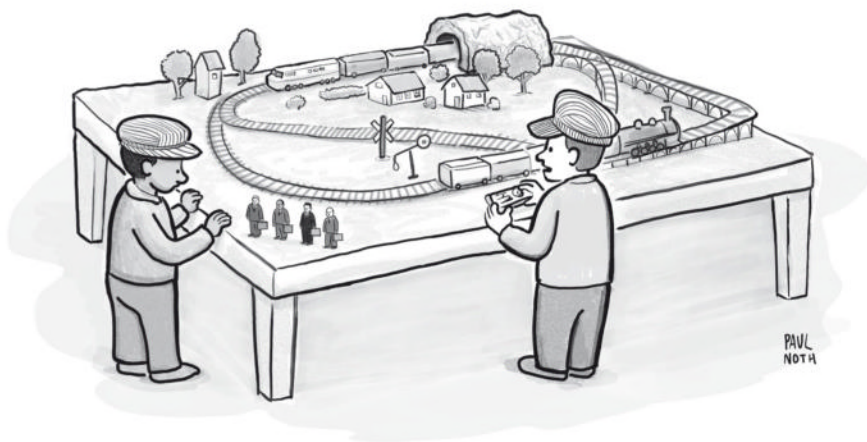
In Vienna, in the gaudy, chandeliered haunts of the Imperial, Kerry was now trying to build on that treaty. After a long day, he emerged from his sessions with the Russians, Turks, and Saudis muttering some diplomatic word globules: the meetings were "constructive and productive and succeeded in surfacing some ideas, which I am not going to share today," and warm congratulations to Austria on the occasion of its national day, and, as for how long Assad will stay in power, "we can agree to disagree."

The talks were more eventful than he let on. As always, some time had to be allotted for posturing and venting. Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi foreign minister, repeatedly reminded the room of Assad's butchery, referring to him Homerically as "the man who's killed three hundred thousand people." Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, scoffed at the

idea of a "moderate" opposition and refused to accept a specific time line for Assad to step down. And it would not be a party if the Russians did not remind everyone of the chaos created by the American invasion of Iraq.

"I hear it all the time," Kerry told me. "I hear it from Lavrov. I mean, we work professionally and we go at things in a constructive way, but he doesn't let me forget Libya or Egypt or Iraq, and the 'color revolutions'—in Ukraine, Georgia, and other states where the Kremlin leadership believes the U.S. has fomented revolt. "I roll with it, but it's important to understand it. I mean, if you're going to try to work something with Russia, you need to understand the degree to which these things matter."

The farrago of competing national interests, the legacies of historical blunders, the fantastical cast of characters, the sheer bloodlust, the prospect of regional if not global conflict—all conspire to make Kerry's task in Syria nearly impossible. But now, after years of moribund diplomacy in the face of horrific bloodshed and waves of terrified refugees, he seemed to be making incremental progress. Not only were he and his negotiating partners talking; they were also heading toward getting Iran in the room. "A gathering of a



"Oh, those are the lobbyists who get us our government subsidies."

group of unthinkable countries," Lavrov called it.

Certainly, there was a greater sense of urgency in Washington, in Moscow, in Europe, and in the Gulf. The Iran nuclear deal, despite opposition in Israel, in Saudi Arabia, and in the U.S. Congress, boosted the credibility of American diplomacy, and of Kerry in particular. Vladimir Putin—in order to prop up the Syrian regime, regain leverage in the Middle East, and restore a sense of post-Soviet Russia as a world power—has returned in force to the Syrian issue, unleashing warplanes on rebel positions, in the name of the fight against ISIS. With terror attacks abroad and the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees, the Syrian crisis is no longer a "foreign" matter for Europe or the United States; it has come to seem a matter of national security.

Back on the plane, Kerry sat perched on the edge of his bed, and told me, "We're trying to break a crazy stalemate." There was a weary desperation in his expression. He knew that the Russians and the Iranians could not endorse the idea that Assad was finished—even if they believed that, ultimately, he was. There could, however, be talks about "political transition." No one, Kerry was saying, wanted the government institutions to "crash," the way they had in Iraq. "And, if you don't want the government to crash, you can't have Assad go boom."

Kerry could not yet know the true

motivation of Putin and the Iranian leadership in agreeing to send emissaries to talks in Vienna: "Are they there only to prop [Assad] up and forever, or are they there helping to try to engineer something to happen? And so I've been trying to put that to the test."

Finally, his voice gave out—I could no longer hear him above the engines of the jet, and he appeared to be in pain. He winced by way of farewell and left me to return to the back of the plane.

When Kerry was appointed by Obama to head the State Department, he made a point of meeting with his predecessors. As a young man, he'd loathed Henry Kissinger. To him, the Nixon Administration represented all that was most cynical about American politics.

Kerry returned from Vietnam a decorated veteran and, as he told the *Times*, "an angry young man." He became a leader of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and, with his forthright style of confession and outrage, he won the admiration of antiwar leaders. On "Meet the Press," Kerry said that he had "committed the same kind of atrocities as thousands of other soldiers have committed": shootings in free-fire zones, harassment, search-and-destroy missions, the burning of villages. Wearing his fatigues and his decorations, Kerry testified, in April, 1971, for two hours before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and asked a question that was quoted around the world: "How

do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"

Kerry said, "Someone has to die so President Nixon won't be, and these are his words, 'the first President to lose a war.'" The Nixon Administration, he said, "has done us the ultimate dishonor. They have attempted to disown us and the sacrifices we made for this country."

Nixon was repelled and, at some level, impressed. Talking on the phone with his counsel, Charles Colson, he said that Kerry was "sort of a phony, isn't he?" But even H. R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff, told the President, "He did a superb job on it at the Foreign Relations Committee yesterday. A Kennedy-type guy, he looks like a Kennedy, and he, he talks exactly like a Kennedy."

But while Kerry made his name in a radical voice, he was always a man of the establishment. More than any diplomat or politician this side of Bill Clinton, he has an abiding faith in the value of personal relationships and of his capacity to persuade. All he has to do is get the parties in a room and he can't lose. Obama, by contrast, has no more cultivated relationships with foreign leaders than he has with Republican leaders. Where Obama is skeptical, Kerry is almost sentimental in his optimism. He has even made his peace with Henry Kissinger: "I seek his advice—he's a brilliant guy." He recounted a lunch that they had recently, at which Kissinger told him, "The difference between you and me is that I think that personal relations don't matter much. I think interests matter." Kerry replied, "I think interests matter, of course, but I think personal relations can help matters—they can be influential."

No one seems to inspire Kerry's outrage, including the worst of his negotiating partners. "I think they want to be valued for who they are and understood for where they come from and what their life is about," he told me. "I think if people have a sense that you know what they're about, they can build some trust with you. . . . I think if you can show them that you understand what their challenge is, how they have to sell it at home or how they have to, what it means, the sacrifice they

might have to make to do X, Y, or Z.”

As a senator, Kerry, who grew up worshipping J.F.K., initially suffered through a vexed relationship with his senior partner, Edward Kennedy. The Kennedy people privately mocked Kerry as stiff, pompous, a “show horse,” as Michael Janeway, the former editor of the Boston *Globe*, once described Kerry to his face. The Kerry people resented Kennedy for grabbing credit for every joint initiative. But, with time, Kerry gained respect in the Senate, particularly for serious work on issues ranging from forging diplomatic relations with Vietnam (along with John McCain) to his investigation into the way the Bank of Credit and Commerce International helped General Manuel Noriega, of Panama, launder his drug money.

Sometimes Kerry could play mad-denyingly to type. During the 2004 campaign, an interviewer for *GQ* asked him, “What’s the best bottle of wine you’ve ever had?” A slicker pol might have mentioned a superb Florida Merlot or an unforgettable Ohio Pinot, but even a novice would know to choose a domestic wine, preferably one in a battleground state. “Probably a Latour 1961,” Kerry answered, thus assuring his campaign the Bordeaux primary.

But he is hardly a prep-school cartoon. During the campaign, for example, the *Globe* discovered both that Kerry’s grandfather was Jewish and that he committed suicide, two facts that Kerry had been unaware of. His family came from distinguished lineages but had little money. Kerry’s first marriage was troubled; his wife, Julia Thorne, suffered from severe depression and wrote that her mind was “ravaged by corroding voices, my body defeated by bone-rattling panics, I sat on the edge of my bed minutes from taking my life.” When he was separated from Thorne, Kerry had what Teresa would call his “gypsy period,” with no fixed address, hustling to see his two daughters, in Boston, while he was working in Washington. (Thorne died of cancer in 2006.)

One of the governing clichés about Kerry is that his four months of combat in Vietnam and his return as a leader of the antiwar-veterans movement shaped his career as a legislator and a diplomat. Kerry told me the war showed

him “that we can make some terrible mistakes when we don’t think it through right. I can remember being in Vietnam watching Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense, flying over me as we went down to do some completely staged ‘invasion’ because the original invasion place had too many Vietcong. These kinds of things stick out at you. It’s the reason that Joseph Heller and ‘Catch-22’ have particular meaning for a lot of us.”

What Vietnam did not instill in Kerry is a sense of ideological consistency. Campaigning for the Senate in 1984, he declared that he would have voted to cancel the B-1 bomber, the F-15, the Trident missile system, and many other weapons systems, only to say later that such votes would have been “ill-advised,” even “stupid.” He disagreed with the Reagan Administration’s adventures in Central America and George H. W. Bush’s decision to build an international coalition and repel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, in 1991. But he supported intervention in Kosovo and, in 2002, with tortured logic, voted for George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq: “I mean, I supported disarming Saddam Hussein, but I was critical of the Administration and how it did its diplomacy and so forth.” Then he voted against the eighty-seven-billion-dollar appropriation to fund reconstruction, as well as military operations, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“He always told me he wanted to be informed by Vietnam but never imprisoned by it,” David Wade, who was a Senate aide to Kerry and, until recently, his chief of staff at the State Department, told me. Vietnam, rather, was an emotional touchstone. On trips with friends to the Vietnam Memorial, Kerry pointed out the engraved names of soldiers who died after the Paris peace talks began. “He would talk about how people died while they argued over the shape of the negotiating table,” Wade recalled.

If Iraq and the general failure of the Arab Spring taught Kerry anything, it is a greater wariness of the idea of democratic crusades. “Having an election does not make a democracy,” he told me. “We learned that with Hamas not too long ago. And I don’t think we’ve always practiced that very carefully, and I think we need to

practice it very carefully, frankly. If people are on a path and making legitimate moves and choices, I’m content to not push the curve beyond its ability to bend. And I think we have to be smarter about that.”

Asked whether the idealism of Woodrow Wilson was too powerful a strain in American foreign policy, he replied, “Yeah, a little bit, probably. I mean, I love Wilson and I love Wilsonian idealism, but it’s very idealistic.”

In the next two days, Kerry kept up his pace. First, he flew to Amman, where he met with King Abdullah and Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian leader. Neither the Jordanians nor the Palestinians were in any mood to meet with Netanyahu, but the issue was violence in Jerusalem and the West Bank and, in Kerryspeak, how to “bring down the temperature.” The meetings, particularly with the Jordanians, were delicate—the King needed to show his subjects that he retained influence over the Temple Mount. And the press conference that Kerry held, alongside the Jordanian foreign minister, at an airport in Amman, was a neatly choreographed jig of indirection. At one point, Kerry, who had done his part to express excruciating evenhandedness in counselling both the Palestinians and the Israelis to ratchet down the “incitement,” watched with stolid irritation as the Jordanian foreign minister, Nasser Judeh, staggered off script. Finally, Kerry scribbled a note and handed it to Judeh, who blinked a few times and wrapped things up. But not before remarking on the obvious: “As always in this part of the world, things have a tendency to erupt.”

The press conference did not reveal that Kerry and Judeh had called Netanyahu and persuaded him to declare publicly that the Israeli government had no intention of changing the status of the Temple Mount—which he did in a video on Facebook. But this was only after hours of cajoling and “flyspecking” statements with Netanyahu and his aides—a process that caused the State Department official to joke that he had “a P.T.S.D. flashback” from the failed 2013-14 peace talks.

Kerry walked to his plane, which

took off into the darkening sky for Saudi Arabia. We arrived late in the evening, which was perfect, because Saudi officials, like moonflowers, bloom at night. The foreign minister, Adel al-Jubeir, greeted Kerry on the tarmac. "There was an appropriately masculine embrace," the pool reporter noted. "They each grabbed the other's upper arm. And the traditional Arab kiss on each cheek, though there was no actual skin contact. You could say it was more of an air kiss."

After talking for a while at the airport, Kerry and Jubeir got in cars and headed to Diriyah Farm, the country residence of the Saudi king, Salman. Salman has been on the throne only since the death of Abdullah, in January, but he is seventy-nine and in spotty health—he reads his talking points off an iPad. Intelligence agencies are already at work trying to sort out who might succeed him.

Kerry entered an opulent reception area that the pool reporter aptly described as a sunken living room the size of "an N.H.L. rink." Aides in robes sat along the walls. "Glance at the men," the pooler noted, "and you know that it has been a long time since

Richard Burton"—the nineteenth-century British explorer—"observed that he had never seen a fat man in the desert." Finally, Kerry met the King, in a smaller room.

"I'm happy to see you," the King said, through his translator.

"I'm happy to see you," Kerry replied. "This is my favorite palace. I love this place."

"This is our original home town," the King said.

When Kerry became Secretary, the Saudis were still angry at the Administration for, in their eyes, betraying a reliable ally-autocrat like Hosni Mubarak. What if the House of Saud came to such a pass? The Saudis were also dismayed by Obama's reluctance to attack Syria. Turki al-Faisal, the former director of Saudi intelligence and a member of the royal family, said, in 2013, that Obama's failure to follow through on his "red line" warning "would be funny if it were not so blatantly perfidious."

The focus of the meeting, for Kerry, was to nail down what had been raised in Vienna the day before, persuading the King to include Iran in the talks on Syria. The King's security council—

including the foreign minister, the Crown Prince, the deputy Crown Prince, the head of intelligence—listened intently as the two men talked. Salman seemed to leave the question of Iran a little more open and told Kerry that he should now meet with the security team. Kerry's team was hopeful, thinking that Salman had given them room to maneuver.

With the King gone, the Saudi advisers, despite their ritual expressions of distaste for Iran, agreed to be in the same room with Zarif at future meetings in Vienna. This would not be first-level news around the world, necessarily, and the war went on, and the waves of refugees kept arriving in Jordan and Turkey and on the shores of Lesbos. But, for Kerry, these were the kinds of moves—a pawn seizing a center square—that just might lead to an endgame.

The flight from Riyadh to Andrews was scheduled to take fifteen hours, with a refuelling stop in Ireland. At Shannon, the plane pulled up to a deserted terminal. Dressed in jeans and a Yale hoodie, Kerry settled down at a table near the bar and ordered a hot toddy and a plate of salmon sandwiches.

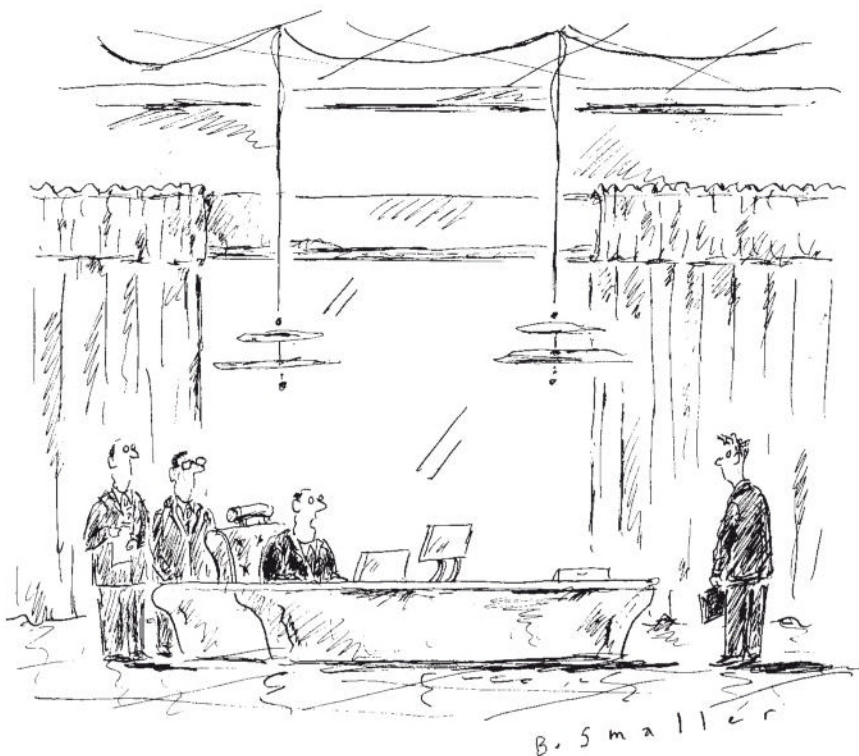
"Damn, these are good," he said.

The proprietor of the bar, who introduced himself as Declan, presented Kerry with a bottle of Irish whiskey and a dram of advice.

"My father died when I was just a few years old and my mother didn't drink," Declan said, "but whenever I was sick she would take a spoonful of this and put it in hot water. Works like a charm."

Kerry smiled professionally, but he was long past charming anyone. He was exhausted, and there was little left to his voice. Yet he kept talking; as he stole glances at a Manchester United game on the TV above the bar, he obsessed about the next week's trip to Vienna, the players at the table, what was possible.

As a diplomat, Hillary Clinton wins credit inside the Administration for visiting a hundred and twelve countries and helping to transform America's image in the world after the catastrophic Bush years. She led efforts to open relations with Burma, brokered a 2012



"Frankly, we're at a loss, so we're looking for someone young and stupid to tell us what to do."

ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, and drafted economic sanctions on Iran. But she was as restrained in her ambitions as she was disciplined. Kerry, by contrast, is considered relentless, sometimes to a fault. There is no concealing his eagerness to make a deal; to a critic, his style is reminiscent of the customer who sternly tells the salesman, “I’m not leaving here until you sell me a car.”

Ben Rhodes, the deputy national-security adviser, said that the President appreciates Kerry’s “willingness to dive in without knowing how the story is going to end. You’re not going to achieve an Iran deal without that.” Kerry hates being cut out of the action. He was, Rhodes admitted, “annoyed” that the opening to Cuba this year had almost nothing to do with the State Department. “That was the only way it was going to get done,” Rhodes said. “That was the Cuban preference. They wanted to deal with the White House.”

But if there is to be any kind of diplomatic progress in Syria it will depend largely on Kerry and his negotiating partners. A week after prevailing on the Saudis to sit at the same table with Iran, he returned to Vienna. Multilateral meetings customarily begin with a round of opening statements from every party in the room, and Zarif and Jubeir, the Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers, laid bare their radically different narratives. In talks with the U.S., Zarif had reminded Kerry of the C.I.A.’s role in the 1953 overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh, the Iranian Prime Minister, and now he reminded Jubeir that fifteen of the 9/11 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia. Jubeir, for his part, had already remarked on Iran’s role in terrorism in the region. The Americans might have found all this amusing had it not been reminiscent of the worst moments of the nuclear talks. When the subject shifted to Syria, the atmosphere hardly lightened. The two blamed each other for fomenting fundamentalism and exploiting the chaos everywhere in the region.

Several times, the American delegation wondered if Zarif or Jubeir or both would walk out. As the afternoon wore on, one foreign minister, who was growing exasperated, turned to one of Kerry’s aides and said, “When is his

hard stop?”—meaning, when does Kerry have to leave for his next flight?

“Not until ten,” the aide said.

The foreign minister sighed. The meeting lasted seven hours.

The victories were small. In the communiqué, Iran and Saudi Arabia allowed themselves to be listed together as participants—a first. The document also carried dog-whistle language about “transition” in Syria but without a time line for Assad’s departure. It mentioned the need to preserve “the rights of all Syrians,” which was meant to assure the Alawite minority, which rules Syria, that there would be no slaughter if Assad gives up power. Any election would have to include the Syrian diaspora, which would lower Assad’s odds of winning.

There is every reason to be skeptical about the effort. What roles will the warring parties in Syria play? How can Russia and Turkey possibly walk toward a common goal after the Turks shot down a Russian bomber? The rebels are deeply fractured—what’s in the talks for them? Who represents them? Under what circumstances would Assad, who, thanks to Russia, is now in a stronger position, step aside? If he is replaced by another figure in the Alawite regime, why would Sunni factions accept that person? And, if there are elections, what would happen if Assad—the ultimate recruiting tool for ISIS—wins? Why would the jihadi militia Jabhat al-Nusra lay down arms?

There will be more meetings in hotel conference rooms, as the war continues and ISIS makes its plans. But, as Kerry’s team was quick to point out, this had been a completely moribund area of diplomacy for the previous two years. When the meeting ended and Kerry read out the language of the communiqué, there was applause.

“Not celebratory, exactly, but significant,” one aide told me. “We’ll see where it goes.”

In the weeks since, Kerry has remained aloft. One day, his plane settled in Samarkand, where he patiently endured a forty-five-minute lecture from the dictator of Uzbekistan. The next day,

he was in Ashgabat, the surreal, peopleless capital of Turkmenistan, a hermetic state where the post-Soviet dictator renamed the days of the week and devoted a national day to the muskmelon. Kerry had flown to Santiago to take part in a conference to save the world’s oceans. Then he was in Paris, in the wake of the terrorist attack at the Bataclan concert hall, to join talks

designed to rescue the earth from overheating to the point of global catastrophe.

“I absolutely love this job,” he told me more than once. “It is so much *fun*.”

Very occasionally, he steals away to relax (to go to the gym, to attend the Harvard-Yale football game) or just to reflect.

When he retires, Kerry said, he’ll write a book and stay involved “somehow” in public affairs, particularly environmental issues. But he doesn’t think about retirement. The butchery in Syria goes on, the Middle East is in a state of dissolution. At dinner at his house, Kerry was talking yet again about his optimism, the prospect for a ceasefire, the end of Assad. I asked what would come next. There aren’t any Thomas Jeffersons waiting to assume power.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Maybe Alexander Hamilton is, who knows?” He laughed and said there was no reason that someone from the secular educated elite could not emerge: “I think the notion that the ophthalmologist from London is somehow the only guy who can run Syria is insulting to Syrians.”

On Veterans Day, he went to Arlington National Cemetery to visit the grave of one of the closest friends he lost in Vietnam—Richard Pershing, the grandson of General John J. Pershing, the commander of American forces during the First World War. When he got there, he saw that there was a crowd around Black Jack Pershing’s grave. Rather than attract attention, he ducked behind a tree and chatted for a while with a military bugler who was there to play “Taps.” After the crowd dispersed, Kerry walked in his pained, ambling way along the rows of graves, countless graves, stone after stone marking war after war. ♦



MEDICAL MOUNTAINEERS

Delivering basic care to the remote Himalayas.

BY REBECCA SOLNIT

To get to Saldang is simple, if not exactly easy. You walk. The nearest airport, many days away by foot, is a rough dirt strip at an altitude of about eight thousand feet. It sits on the side of a Himalayan mountain in the Dolpo district of northwest Nepal, on the border with Tibet. Heading north from the village of Juphal, a labyrinth of small houses on a steep slope, you encounter a place where fossil fuels are not part of daily life. In much of the region, there are no roads. Horses, mules, and yaks—and men, women, and children—carry goods on trails.

One autumn day, the Nomads Clinic, a medical-service trip, pilgrimage, and adventure expedition, set off from Juphal with six riding horses, and fifty pack mules laden with a month's worth of food, cooking equipment, camping gear, and clothing. Six duffels were stuffed with medicine and medical equipment—asthma inhalers, deworming pills, vitamins, analgesics, antibiotics. Others held hundreds of solar lights, toothbrushes, sunglasses, and reading glasses, to be given away. It was the 2015 edition of a mobile clinic that Joan Halifax, a seventy-three-year-old American teacher of Zen Buddhism, has been coordinating since the nineteen-eighties, to provide medical care in places where there is little or none.

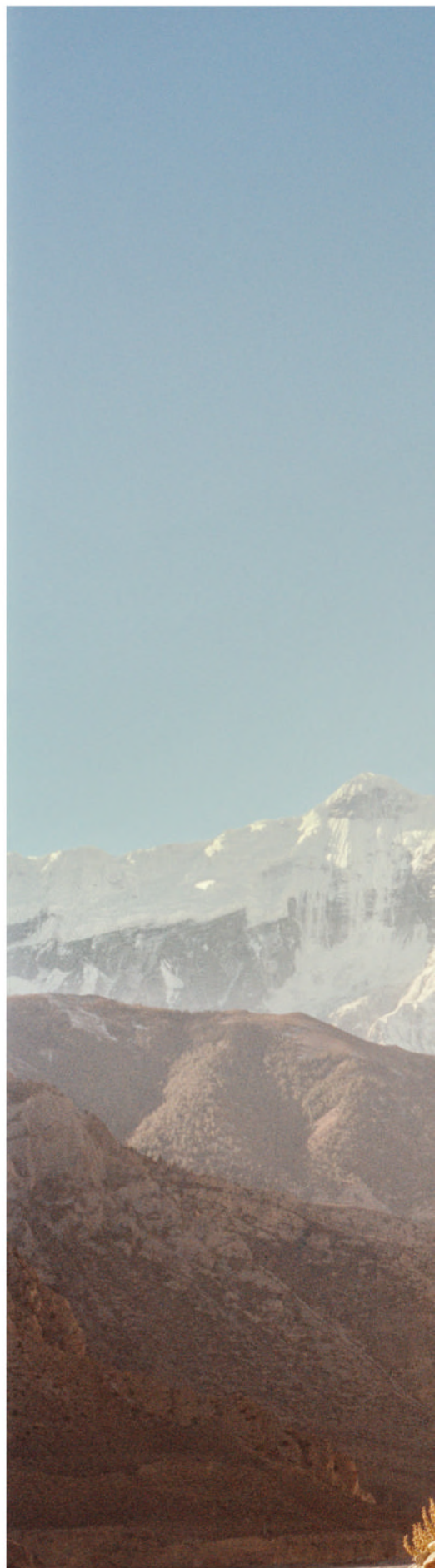
This year, after the earthquake in Nepal, Halifax contemplated scrapping plans for the trek to Dolpo. But she considers poverty and lack of resources to be an ongoing disaster in Nepal, and she decided that there was no reason to neglect Dolpo, which is as materially poor as it is culturally rich. (In the meantime, she organized Kathmandu-based earthquake relief efforts from afar.) Our group included a doctor, four nurses, and a nurse practitioner from North America;

a young lama, and a Nepali nurse born in Saldang; a German acupuncturist; and an *amchi*, or practitioner of Tibetan medicine. There were also a thirty-year-old, record-breaking mountaineer named Pasang Lhamu Sherpa and her husband, Tora Akita, a physical therapist from Kathmandu; a number of Westerners; and Nepali mule men, horsemen, cooks, guides, and translators.

The first day, the caravan travelled north through fields where wild hemp and pomegranate trees were growing on a slope that descended to the Tarap River. The second day, we continued through groves of wild walnuts and small stands of bamboo. The third day, there were apricots hanging on gangly young trees along the hillsides and cliffs. The fourth day, the terrain became more arid, and the plant species fewer and more sparsely distributed. We climbed high above the river and then, by a roaring waterfall, found the riverbed again. Finally, at an altitude of almost twelve thousand feet, we arrived at Lake Phoksundo, which is sacred to locals and is the approximate turquoise shade of a Las Vegas swimming pool. (Photographs of it look badly manipulated.) We were now in upper Dolpo, on the southern rim of the Tibetan plateau, one of the highest, harshest inhabited areas on earth.

The trail to the lake passed through Ringmo, a village of two-story stone houses. Men walked down from the heights with huge loads of hay on their backs. Along the main path, an old woman dug tiny potatoes out of the soil with her hands. Later, we saw men behind wooden plows pulled by yaks, the shaggy, hump-backed beasts that roam everywhere in upper Dolpo, and whose milk is used to make yogurt, cheese, and butter. The butter is stirred into tea and burned in lamps. Women used handmade wooden

Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, a record-breaking climber from northeastern Nepal. She and her husband, a physical therapist, began working with the Nomads Clinic in 2013.





rakes, and after threshing the barley they tossed the results into the wind, letting the chaff blow away and the grain fall back into baskets.

Before the Chinese invasion of Tibet, in 1950, the herds of yaks, horses, sheep, and goats were larger, and people moved freely between Dolpo and Tibet, where salt mined from the dry bed of an ancient sea was traded for grain, which the high plateau lacked. But, as China clamped down on the border, the Dolpo population's longtime use of Tibetan winter pastures ended. And the market for Tibetan salt was undermined by subsidized imports from India.

The residents of lower Dolpo, some Hindu and others Buddhist, mostly speak Nepali, and greeted us with "*Namaste*" ("I bow to you"). Past Ringmo, in upper Dolpo, the principal language is Tibetan, and the greeting is "*Tashi delek*," meaning something like "blessings and good luck." Both Buddhism and Bon, a religion indigenous to Tibet, are practiced there. The landscape is studded with *gompas*, fortresslike structures combining the functions of library, seminary, and temple. Some date back several hundred years, and many have a pair of seated golden deer on their entry gates. The lama accompanying us said that deer were among the first creatures to listen to the Buddha.

In the course of nearly four weeks, our group walked between four and ten hours on the days when clinics were not held. We followed a steep oval circuit through the mountains, covering about a hundred and forty miles. A few nurses were stationed in the towns in Dolpo, but we heard that they never stayed long, and for most inhabitants the nearest hospital was too far away. There were five clinics, and we treated almost seven hundred people, out of an estimated five thousand residents of the upper Dolpo region.

The first clinic was set up at Lake Phoksundo. Patients came in with digestive troubles, infections, and, often, strained necks and sore joints from a lifetime of carrying big open baskets full of apples or firewood or household goods.

Alcoholism is widespread in Dolpo, and the few tiny shops we saw offered Chinese liquor among their meagre wares, though most people drank homemade *raksi*, a hard liquor made from grain.

One morning, we went to the Bon monastery, on a promontory above Lake Phoksundo, where a smiling, red-clad monk showed us the four-hundred-year-old rooms, with murals of lamas on horseback and painted Buddhas in the lotus position—the colors were blue, green, yellow, red, and white, like those of the prayer flags fluttering in the sunshine. Then he apologized for being drunk. The abbot told us that the monastery had been built to protect the blue sheep, creatures related to mountain goats and ibexes, from hunters who would drive them down the mountains and then herd them over the bluff to their death.

Occasionally, during the two days we were camped there, we gazed across the blue water at the trail that awaited us on the steep hillside beyond. It looked as though someone had casually scratched it with a stick, the way you might draw on a map with a pencil, not like something you should trust with your life. The term "trade routes" may summon up visions of broad paths, but thousand-pound yaks can traverse faint, canted trails the width of your outspread hands.

From Phoksundo, Saldang was still a week away, over one pass that rose to more than 17,600 feet and another to about 16,700 feet. Our *sirdar*, or head guide, noted that years ago there was a great deal of ice at the highest pass, but we found only a retreating mass of snow in a shadowy stretch of the path. We all got used to moving steadily along, amid the scree, the dust, the ruts, the trails built to hang out over the abyss, the slippery slabs of rock, the staircases of irregular stones, the rickety bridges of logs or old wood patched with flat stones. There was rarely a phone signal in the regions where we ventured, though at one of the high passes the young Nepali men in our expedition lined up to make calls, looking like regulars at a bar three miles high, scoured by wind, with hundred-mile views.

Between the two passes lay Shey Gumpa, the ancient monastery of the Crystal Mountain, one of the holiest peaks in Tibetan Buddhism. The old abbot told us about a predecessor, hundreds of years earlier, who had first recognized that the mountain was sacred, and about the ability to recognize the sacred as a special gift or talent. Tenzin Norbu, the outfitter for our expedition,

told us that prayers here had several thousand times the power they have elsewhere. Inside, we saw ranks of butter lamps burning before golden Buddhas on an altar flanked by gaily painted shelves of sacred texts bound in bright silk. Outside, we saw people who had walked there from fuel-starved Saldang to gather dung from the ample supply that passing mules provided.

The abbot welcomed the Nomads Clinic into the temple, and locals asked the doctor and the nurses to treat wounds, address pains, listen to stories. The first evening, a horseman brought in a comrade, who was too sick to walk. "He was such a beautiful man, and he was almost dead when I first saw him," the doctor, who diagnosed a severe kidney infection and treated him with antibiotics, said. The man, who was in his early forties, had a drawn, sun-darkened face, a faint mustache, the high cheekbones of most of the Nepalis in the region, and a thick coil of crimson strands of wool around his braided black hair. He wore camo-patterned tennis shoes. The next day, he was back on his feet, lingering outside the monastery to make contact with the doctor and the nurses coming from meditation inside.

The medical staff treated sixty-five people in Shey, mostly nomads from the tents on the river plain below the monastery and beyond. They shared their complaints with smiles and good grace. Dolpo residents wandered into camp throughout the trip: a pregnant woman with infected breasts; a group of children who had impetigo, escorted by their anxious mothers. Some conditions were curable. Some were not. To a man with a broken pelvis and a woman with a broken back, we could offer only painkillers and advice. The morning after the clinic, we packed up and set out again.

Joan Halifax started the Nomads Clinic in 1980, and it has grown by increments in the decades since. She goes by the Japanese honorific *roshi*, or teacher, and has made annual trips to Nepal and Tibet for thirty-five years. She has circumambulated the 21,778-foot Mt. Kailash, another of the sacred peaks, eight times, and has wandered far into Tibet and into the mountains of Nepal, where she learned practical things, such as how to give a horse an



The Nomads Clinic spent almost a month trekking through the Himalayas of Nepal, one of the remotest places on earth.

enema. (She oversaw one for a sick gelding on the 2015 trip.) She has been inside many of the region's monasteries, and she recently visited one treasure house in which the ancient skull of the monastery's founder lived on as a *kapala*, or ritual cup.

In Nepal, relics owned by monasteries have been stolen, and sold on the black market in Kathmandu, China, and elsewhere; some Dolpo *gompas* have taken to burying their treasures. In 2011, the household of a friend of Halifax's—in Humla, a district west of Dolpo—was

robbed of its family gods, sacred statues that had been with the household for many generations. Halifax used social media to help track down the figures. The main statue, a fourteenth-century Tibetan bronze medicine Buddha—the Buddha who presides over spiritual and physical healing—had reportedly been on the black market for two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. The robbers, known as the Karnali Tigers, were caught and imprisoned in Humla. “I visited the prison,” Halifax told me. “A true hellhole.” (Last month, robbers

raided the monastery at Shey Gompa, beating up the caretaker and stealing several statues.)

“The idea of just tromping around the mountains never appealed to me,” Halifax said. “I’d rather stay home on my *zafu*”—her meditation cushion—“and study the dharma.” Halifax’s medium is psyches, communities, and social systems. Through her many activities—teaching, bridging cultures with such projects as the Nomads Clinic, drawing people to social activism and a contemplative life—she can be imagined as a weaver or a

SIGGY



SO I RUN INTO KRAFFT-EBING DOWN AT THE KIT KAT KLUB. I SAY, "KRAFFTY! WHAT'S A HEAD CASE LIKE YOU DOING IN A JOINT LIKE THIS?"

HE COMES IN CLOSE, NOSE TO NOSE, AND SAYS, "SIGGY! HOW'S ABOUT YOU GO SUCK A RADISH!"

HA-HA. I GOTTA TELL YOU — WE SPLIT A GUT OVER THAT ONE. HA-HA-HA-HA-HA.

AND THEN WE STROLLED ARM IN ARM OUT INTO THE COOL TEUTONIC NIGHT AND TALKED FOR A VERY LONG TIME ABOUT SEX.

ZIGGERS

sculptor, conjuring new forms out of her raw material: people and groups. To intervene in individuals' lives takes confidence, which she has in abundance.

In Dolpo, Halifax wore a black robe with a white hat, layers of black down vests and coats, and a pair of Merrells. Most of the time, she travelled astride a calm, compact white horse. You could consider riding less demanding than

walking, but if you got on a horse in that terrain you continually encountered the abyss and your own mortality. "I remind myself that the horse wants to live," Halifax often says. She dismounted during the most treacherous passages, with the hovering presence and sometimes the firm hand of her longtime attendant in Nepal, a lean, quiet Humla man named Buddhi. Halifax has oste-

oporosis, and a fall could be serious, but she's chosen risk over limits.

In many of Dolpo's holy places, Halifax was received as an honored guest, and although she says that she doesn't enjoy the attention and the gifts, she accepts them as acknowledgments of the ties between ancient Buddhism and the young Buddhism of the West, and as an honor to a woman in a male-dominated tradition. At each temple, gossamer silk scarves were draped around her neck—white, saffron, turquoise, red. Bows of acknowledgment were performed and formal speeches were made. She was seated in state while chants were recited.

Halifax was brought up in Coral Gables, Florida. An illness left her blind from the ages of four to six, and those two years, she said, led her to discover that she had an inner life: "The blessing that comes from catastrophe has been a theme in my life." She recovered, raised a condemnatory eyebrow at débutante balls—her right eyebrow still does a lot of critical work for her—and vowed to escape. Her first step was college in New Orleans, where she participated in sit-ins and civil-rights marches. Afterward, she became a research assistant to the musicologist Alan Lomax, at the Bureau of Applied Social Research, at Columbia University.

She rode many of the waves of upheaval of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, and had a knack for landing where events were getting interesting. She went to Paris in 1968 to work at the Musée de l'Homme, arriving just in time to witness the student uprising that became a general revolt. She travelled to Algeria at the behest of the Algerian Ambassador to France, who hoped she could figure out why former revolutionaries in one neighborhood had such a high suicide rate. Her conclusion was that, when the war was over, "there was no one external to fight," and the conflict went inward.

In Algeria, she also met the Black Panthers Stokely Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver. "When I saw Eldridge in Algiers, I was taken aback," she recalled. "I was sitting in a café near the ministry of tourism, and there he was, the Black Panthers' minister of information, strolling down the street, a fugitive and free." Algiers, she told me, was filled with spies, intrigues, music,

dance, “and a sense of revolution and possibility.” A man whose advances she rebuffed reported her as a spy, and she did a brief stint in an Algerian jail.

Most lives have lulls. Hers so far hasn’t. “I just lived as though my hair were on fire,” she said. Halifax spent much of 1969 among the Dogon tribe of Mali, whose ritual life made her wonder what new rites might be available to Westerners—especially the dying, for whom “spiritual and psychological issues leap into sharp focus,” she wrote in her 2008 book, “Being with Dying.” In 1972, Halifax married the Czech psychiatrist Stanislav Grof and joined his experiments in psychedelic drugs as therapeutic tools for the dying. (They divorced five years later.) Sick with hepatitis, which she contracted in Africa, and generally in crisis, she turned in earnest to Buddhism.

In 1975, Halifax became a student of Seung Sahn, an innovative Korean Zen master based in Providence, Rhode Island, whose methods were influenced by Korean shamanism. She took up the tough Korean version of Zen, which involved doing a hundred and eight prostrations (think pushups, with devotion) before daily meditation at 5 A.M. During her Buddhist training, she was ordained by Seung Sahn and then by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist teacher and antiwar activist. Through Nhat Hanh, Halifax said, she was “inspired by the relationship between social action and contemplative life.” Halifax also trained with Bernie Glassman, who taught what is sometimes called “engaged Zen.” Participants in his “street retreats,” instead of withdrawing into a sanctuary, lived as homeless people.

In 1990, Halifax founded the Upaya Zen Center, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a residential community with daily meditation, weekly talks, and a busy schedule of meditation retreats, workshops, and seminars. In the spirit of Glassman, Halifax has trained disciples who work with the homeless, with prisoners, and with the dying. She is still the abbess at Upaya, although she’s away about half the year. In 2015, she has been to Hawaii twice, once to teach about death and dying with Ram Dass, and once to teach about compassion; to Japan, to lead a program on temples and shrines; to Costa Rica, to conduct a seminar on Buddhism. She has

also given talks this year in Singapore, New York, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Louisville. A few months after the Nepal odyssey, she flew to Bangalore, for a conference of the Mind and Life Institute, an organization that blends scientific and contemplative approaches to the study of the mind (Halifax sits on the board). Zen gives her the ability to be at home anywhere.

Halifax was once a great beauty, with fierce blue eyes and long chestnut hair. She shaved the hair off in 1996, and can describe the moment when, in Santa Fe, turning onto Gonzales Road from Cerro Gordo Road, she realized she’d been conditioned to think that “pair bonding” was an inevitable and necessary part of her life. She took up celibacy and independence—but not solitude. She calls herself an introvert with a personality, but she responds to e-mails in a flash and uses social media constantly.

She travels with Noah Rossetter, a thirty-year-old Zen priest with a light-hearted disposition, a knack for technology, and the steadiness to keep the many parts of her life from tangling up. The two amuse each other with banter and by occasionally singing snatches from operas. They could be mistaken for a comedy team: in camp at Lake Phoksundo, when someone asked about what to do with “number one and number two,”

Halifax answered, “Be one with nature,” and Rossetter added sternly, “Push duality in the hole.”

Halifax keeps in touch with many dying people, and also with film stars, affluent donors, scholars of consciousness, and monastics in various traditions, including the Dalai Lama and her Zen students. She said that, after years of involvement with medical care, she sees “much suffering in the experience of Western clinicians, weighed down by the demands of their institutions—which are demands to protect the institutions from being harmed.” She takes the clinicians she recruits “to a place where cure isn’t necessarily possible but care is,” and said that the experience of working with patients on the trips was “a kind of grace or blessing.”

On the afternoon of Saturday, April 25th, a temblor, as Halifax put it, “tore the heart out of Nepal.” It was followed by an aftershock in May. Together, they killed an estimated nine thousand people; shut down the tourist industry; smashed about half a million homes, displacing a population of about three million; triggered avalanches that cut off high-altitude villages; and, in Kathmandu, crumbled many ancient religious sites. The quake was centered in Gorkha, a district in the middle of Nepal.

When Halifax heard the news, she



“Am I getting warmer?”



GREETINGS, FRIENDS!

BY IAN FRAZIER



This Christmas we are staying in,
Skyping en masse with all our kin
And friends linked up in cyberspace,
Slipping the surly bonds of place,
And traffic on the Tappan Zee,
Cross Bronx, and Hutch, and B.Q.E.
To keep us alert and itchin',
The brake lights we put in the kitchen
Are set on Hazard. They look gay,
Flashing throughout the holiday.
So—greetings, all! Pull up a screen!
You're coming through quite well, we mean.
And we are, too? That rocks! That's great!
Hi there, Paul Rudd! No, you're not late.
Pope Francis, too! Pope, Paul; Paul, Pope.
You will become great friends, we hope.
And now, with Skype cascades of chimes,
More folks stop in to join our rhymes:
The Zuckerbergs, with daughter Max;
Rihanna, from a lounge at LAX;
Masaharu Morimoto
(The Iron Chef); Sonia Soto-
mayor, our own Bronx-born jurist;
Rolf, a New York City tourist
(Good thing we've got eight screens, or ten,
The extra-wide kind, in our den);
Anthony Sadler, Spencer Stone,
And Alek Skarlatos, now well-known
Winners of the Légion d'Honneur,
Heroes of tremendous *coeur*:
What you did, guys, outdoes terrific;
Bravery is always civic.
Applause and praises also for
French Pres. Hollande; we wish him more
Of all that's good, and all best luck.
Now warm air hugs to Wolfgang Puck,
Carter Burwell, ace composer,
Selfless Dr. Ian Crozier,
Rita Ora, Buck Showalter,
Charlotte Brown, the blind pole vaulter,
Top model Arizona Muse,
San Juan's Mayor Carmen Cruz,
The D.C. zoo's new baby panda,
And Lin-Manuel Miranda.
If our eyes do not mislead us,
"The Walking Dead"'s Norman Reedus
With "Nurse Jackie"'s Edie Falco
Stand there waving from the balcony of Slash, their bud and neighbor,
With Tom Perez, the Sec. of Labor.
Hey, look! The Mets are here—all of 'em.

So they lost, so what, we love 'em!
Let pop-ups from the T-shirt gun
Lead cheers for Curtis Granderson,
Harvey, deGrom, and the whole bunch;
Next year they'll eat the Royals' lunch.
Leaning back in our recliner,
We hear voices, each one finer
Than the preceding. When Adele
Sings just a single Jingle Bell—
Such bliss! When, soon, the snowflakes fall,
She takes the plunge and sings them all.
Then the skies start getting darker;
With wine docent Robert Parker
We raise a toast, and send fond thoughts
To all the staff at Toys for Tots,
And each Scout and each Obama;
Joy to Wilmer Valderrama,
Misty Copeland, ballet diva,
Carlos Slim, who plans to leave a
Fortune in somebody's stocking
(Now, that really will be shocking),
Madea's main man Tyler Perry,
Dr. Summers (known as Larry),
Benji Madden, Gretchen Mol,
Josh Earnest and Carlotta Gall.
Strong wishes of good hope and cheer
Pulse electronically from here
To Janet Yellen, of the Fed,
Possessor of outstanding cred,
Loretta Lynn and Babs Mandrell
(Those ladies who know Nashville well),
Joaquin Phoenix, Susan Braudy,
And that daft congressman Trey Gowdy,
While our benign designs descend
On each Dem and Republican;
May hearts unclench and eyes see light,
Just briefly, on this starry night.
Dear friends, the year had ups and downs.
A dearth of comfort to be found
In how the world is unreeling
Can't deflate a hopeful feeling.
Next year may bring a whole new phase,
A plentitude of better days,
Grace completely unexpected,
Previously undetected,
Perfect breaks we don't deserve
And don't need to; so let's swerve
Upward, onward in the crush
Of this season's crazy rush,
Jumping with both feet, not looking,
On amazing grace depending.

began checking in on Facebook with everyone she knew in the area. Her mountaineer friend Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, who guides climbs of major peaks around the world, was with a client near Base Camp on Mt. Everest, where the quake prompted an avalanche. Many people fled, but Pasang went toward the avalanche, in the futile hope of finding survivors; nineteen people died. Pasang dispatched her client, and got a helicopter ride to Kathmandu, where she joined her husband, Tora Akita. She announced her safe arrival on Facebook, and on April 30th asked friends and family for support—manpower, food, blankets, tents—as she and Tora headed into the wreckage.

A few years ago, one of Pasang's clients introduced her to Halifax, and the two women took to each other. "What I recognized in Pasang," Halifax recalls, "is a quality that I had when I was her age—incredible drive and this feeling that we as women were born for a mission that is compassion-based. I was meeting a person who had very few contrivances, who had been as a child exposed to a lot of suffering, and had become a role model for women at a global level." Pasang and Tora joined Nomads Clinic trips in 2013 and 2014.

The husband and wife look a bit alike: Tora has a wing of black hair over his brow, Pasang has dark hair to her waist, and both have expressions of self-effacing kindness. Tora is unusually tall for that part of the world, and is slender in a way that in a woman might be called willowy. Pasang, at five feet seven, is tall, too. At first, you notice only that she's beautiful. Later, you realize that her rounded limbs and her torso are tremendously powerful.

After the earthquake, the three became the core of a disaster-relief team. Halifax raised a quarter of a million dollars; Tora was the central coordinator of a shifting, growing group of volunteers and supplies; and Pasang went deep into the disaster zones. In Kathmandu, Pasang and Tora worked with Thomas Mathew, an erudite fifty-year-old Indian man, to organize help. With dozens of volunteers, they directed convoys of trucks, moving forty tons of rice at a time; found sources for salt, lentils, and cooking oil in volume; and had tarps trucked in from India. Tora was sometimes so busy that he talked on

two phones at once, and he went on many of the relief missions that headed out in the middle of the night. Pasang coordinated the efforts of drivers, donors, volunteers, porters, and locals. On the scene, she made sure that supplies were distributed equitably, and commanded village chiefs and truck drivers alike. For a Nepali woman, it was an unlikely role. Mathew recalled, "She has the authority. She has the voice. It comes from the gut."

As a high-altitude mountaineer, Pasang had often hired helicopters and knew many of the pilots who took climbers and adventurers around Nepal. She worked with them to deliver supplies. In a relief effort for Laprak, one of the Gorkha villages that were cut off by landslides, she organized three hundred local men as porters to carry food and tarps, enlisting them in disaster relief while arranging for them to be paid out of funds that Halifax had raised. An estimated twenty thousand Nepalis a year are trafficked, and, in the chaos of the earthquake's aftermath, there were more opportunities to seize victims. Pasang began giving talks in the refugee camps about how to protect oneself. When no one came, she announced that she was giving away sanitary napkins, and delivered her speech when the women arrived.

On the Nomads trip, during the steepest passages and at the highest altitudes, even those of us who had done some training approached the limits of our capacity. Almost everyone—excluding Pasang and the tough young Nepali men—found that walking uphill at the highest elevations left a person panting. Pasang's energies remained essentially untapped by any challenge—a ten-hour walk, a five-thousand-foot gain in altitude, a freezing night in a tent, air so dry that fingers cracked and noses bled. When a young woman sprained her ankle, Pasang was the first person on the scene. When dinner was ready, she served it. When the women's clinic was held, she was the translator and the doorkeeper. She carried rescue equipment in her big day pack, watching over us like a shepherdess.

Pasang was born in 1984 in a village about thirteen thousand feet high, and grew up in the town of Lukla, often called the gateway to Mt. Everest. As a child, she resolved that she would climb

the mountain. Her father died when she was a toddler, her mother when she was fifteen. By the time she was eighteen, she was training in a male-dominated Nepali mountaineering school while supporting her younger sister. Like Halifax, she was supposed to have one destiny but made another. In her community, she said, women were meant to marry young and raise children. "They think I'm doing something wrong," she said.

In August, 2006, she became the first Nepali woman mountaineering instructor, and the first woman to ascend the 24,117-foot Nangpai Gosum II. Not long afterward, she was injured while climbing, when her handhold on a cliff crumbled. She swung hard on the rope anchored below her, smashing her hip. The injury made it difficult to do the lateral moves that climbing requires.

Almost a year later, a Japanese team doing cleanup on Mt. Everest invited her to climb the mountain from the less-traversed, Chinese side. She scraped together the money for boots, crampons, and the rest of the gear, but her injury got worse. Someone recommended a Japanese physical therapist in Kathmandu. It was Tora, whose father is Japanese and whose mother is Nepalese. "He was so young, so handsome," Pasang told me. "And he's, like, 'You shouldn't climb.' I'm, like, 'No, I want to climb.' He treated me four days. Every day three hours, and then—gone, the pain was gone. He kept saying, 'You shouldn't go.'" She went.

When she was on Mt. Everest, her injury reasserted itself. "I couldn't climb," she said. "I had to grab my leg and put it down, grab my leg and put it down." She did exercises that Tora had taught her, and made the climb on ibuprofen and will power. She returned in dire need of physical therapy. In gratitude for Tora's help, Pasang offered to take him trekking. He asked to see her home town in the Himalayas. The patient-caregiver relationship became a friendship, and the friendship became a romance. They married in 2010. Mathew remembers that Tora and Pasang wore traditional Sherpa clothing at the wedding. Marriage didn't interfere with her mountaineering. She said, "I wanted to show and tell people, If you really want it,

it doesn't matter if you're married or you're mothers."

Last year, with two other Sherpa women, Pasang organized a Nepali women's ascent of K2, the mountain in Pakistan that is nine hundred feet shorter than Mt. Everest but far more dangerous. About one in ten climbers dies in the attempt to climb K2. Its violent weather offers climbers smaller windows of time to summit, and chunks of ice fall off the face that climbers must scale. Getting up its couloir, or

ice gully, known as the Bottleneck, is a brutal ordeal. Only fifteen women had climbed K2, and, despite the number of Nepalese Sherpas in high-altitude mountaineering, no Nepali women had made the ascent until Pasang and her companions did, on July 24, 2014. Pasang told me that everyone had told her that K2 was a killer, but "I just wanted to feel what this mountain is." In a picture taken at the summit, she wears a red snowsuit and huge boots that make her appear bulky, a little un-

real, like a Transformer toy, but her helmet and oxygen mask are off, and she looks bold and free.

Twelve days after we started, we came down from the second pass, Sela La, to Saldang. To a visitor, the thirteen-thousand-foot-high settlement looks like a picture from a fairy tale or a volume of "The Arabian Nights"—nothing extra, everything emblematic. The stone houses, plastered the same color as the dusty slopes, are surrounded by small, terraced barley fields and rough stone walls, sometimes enclosing a horse or a yak or a barking mastiff. Their flat roofs, reached by ladders made of logs notched with steps, are fringed with the grayish brush that fuels the sheet-metal stoves inside. White prayer flags snap in the strong afternoon wind, and *stupas*, three-tiered mud towers to the spirit, rise from the ridges.

The clinic was set up in the school. People came dressed in traditional clothing, the women and girls wearing ankle-length tunics with kick-pleats, scarves and shawls in rich purples and hot pinks, and necklaces of turquoise and coral disks. Some of the children wore shirts emblazoned with names like Adidas; they must have come from as far away as the ocean coral. Others wore Tibetan-style sashed jackets and tunics. It was as though all the region's color had been stripped from the eroded hills and deposited on the people.

As they waited in line, some of the men swung brass prayer wheels, and some of the women spun woollen thread on drop spindles. Children carried smaller children on their backs or played, and everyone chatted. The man with the kidney infection from Shey Gompa was among them, with the same red yarn ornament and the same black braid. He had been near death, and was now able to travel as fast as we were.

The clinic was welcomed with a speech from the school principal, in Tibetan and English, and schoolchildren danced to scratchy music emanating from speakers on stands in the dusty yard, powered by the solar energy system next to the school. There was a traditional Tibetan dance, a Nepali dance, and a theatrical pantomime



"You won't believe how many Frisbees are up here!"

performed to a mixture of music and the Dalai Lama's voice, advocating non-violence. The children reenacted the invasion of Tibet; those playing the Chinese carried wooden guns. A girl in a blue blouse gave a stunning performance of dying in slow agony.

Then the nurse practitioner administered gynecological exams in the only closed room in the clinic, with Pasang guarding the door. Everywhere else, families crowded into the dim school-rooms to watch what the clinicians did, and children poked their heads in the windows, which had brightly painted shutters but no glass. The nurses gave away the last of the prenatal vitamins, but the children had already been dewormed by a visiting nurse, so they didn't distribute the deworming pills. Long lines stretched from wherever the bodyworkers were practicing.

The doctor listened to hearts and lungs. He looked at wounds, sores, eyes, ears, throats, skin, joints. He dispensed what care he could—pain relievers, antibiotics, steroid creams, asthma inhalers, advice to stop drinking the moonshine and to quit smoking cigarettes. (Packets with diseased-lung images on both sides littered all the long-distance trails.) Later, the doctor told me that when he looked into people's eyes with an ophthalmoscope he rarely saw a "red reflex"—the red light bouncing off a healthy retina. Instead, he saw the opacity of eyes beginning to form cataracts from long exposure to the blazing sun of the high-altitude desert.

There was too much light and yet not enough. The evening after the Saldang clinic, we visited the mother of Pema Dolma, a young nurse and Saldang native who had moved to Kathmandu and come back to trek with us. Her mother lived with Pema's half sister, who was mute, and a granddaughter in a small, square house with one tiny window in its thick walls. The house was feebly illuminated by a slender fluorescent tube hooked up to a rooftop solar panel.

I asked Pema Dolma what her mother did for light before she got solar, seven years ago. The older woman brought out a flickering brass butter lamp. We were served butter tea, and



"I'm sorry, everyone—my e-mail account got hacked last night by some alcohol."

we gave them three solar lights. The next morning, we began our return journey, heading south.

The suffix "-la" is a term of respect and affection in Dolpo: Halifax became Roshila, Pasang became Pasang-la, and so forth. The syllable also describes a high-altitude pass. As we descended from upper Dolpo, we looked southeast from the last pass—Jyanta La—toward Dhaulagiri, the world's seventh-highest peak. In the white mountain ranges above the heights we traversed, snow and glaciers feed the streams that flow through these arid, stony places. The same sources water the barley and the potato fields, the livestock, the farmers, and the nomads of Dolpo, and extend far beyond it. A billion and a half people are nourished by water from the Tibetan plateau, which pours out into the Yangtze, the Yellow River, the Mekong, the Ganges, and the other legendary rivers reaching across Asia. The last river we travelled was a tributary of a tributary of the Ganges.

Throughout the region, the snow and the glacial ice are withering away. Halifax recalled a Tibetan prophecy, "When the

mountains wear black hats, the world will end," and interpreted the black hats as the peaks without snow and ice. One day, some of the clear, cold streams and rivers flowing through upper Dolpo might dry up for part of the year, or stop entirely. The people who never had coal or electricity might be forced out of this place where the butter lamps are still lit before golden Buddhas in the old painted *gompas*, and where the barley is harvested by hand.

During the final days of our journey, snow began to dust the hills behind us, coming lower and lower, as if the door were closing for the year on Dolpo. In the first settlement below Jyanta La, when the tumbling alpine stream had become a gentle river, we encountered the first internal-combustion engine of the trip, a motorcycle, probably brought in by helicopter. Past the agricultural valley of Dho Tarap, we returned to the world of trees: hanging gardens of birches, golden in autumn, high up the gorge of the river; tall pines with clusters of blue cones; huge cedars; wild fruit trees. Along the canyon of the rushing Tarap River, we made our way back to Juphal. ♦

PORTFOLIO

HIGH ASPIRATIONS

In an Andean city, an influx of prosperity has brought dozens of buildings that meld deep traditions and futuristic influences.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER GRANSER

The Bolivian architect Freddy Mamani Silvestre doesn't have an office, use a computer, or draw formal blueprints. He sketches his plans on a wall or transmits them orally to his associates. Since 2005, Mamani and his firm have completed sixty projects in El Alto, the world's highest city, which sits at nearly fourteen thousand feet, on an austere plateau above La Paz. In the past twenty years, the economy there has burgeoned, along with an enterprising, mostly indigenous population. Mamani earned his fame building mixed-use dream houses for the city's nouveaux riches.

Like most of his clients, and like some 1.6 million of his fellow-citizens, Mamani is an Aymara. His people have been subject to successive waves of conquest and dispossession, first by the Inca, then by the Spanish. As a young man, he worked in construction; in his early twenties, he earned a degree in civil engineering, against the advice of his family. "It's a career for the rich," they told him. Architecture, too, is a career for the rich. But Mamani has made an advantage of his outsider status; he designs in an Aymara vernacular of his own invention.

Each of his houses has a futuristic façade, a commercial ground floor with jazzy shop fronts, a baroque party hall on the mezzanine, a story or two of apartments, and an owner's penthouse. This aerie is sometimes called a *cholet*, a pun on the words "chalet" and "*cholo*"—a dismissive racial epithet that *cholos* like Mamani have proudly embraced. Mamani's architecture incorporates circular motifs from Aymara weaving and ceramics and the neon colors of Aymara dress, and it alludes to the staggered planes of Andean temples. But it has also been inspired by science fiction, particularly by the Transformer movies. It might be called, like the second film in the saga, "Revenge of the Fallen."

—Judith Thurman



El Alto is Bolivia's newest city, and, Mamani has said, "I am trying to give it an identity based on Aymara culture."



Mamani's buildings are designed for economic self-sufficiency. Owners lease out the ground floor to shops, the apartments to members of their



extended family, and the party hall, on the mezzanine, for gatherings. The initial investment in a building can be recouped in a few years.



The vibrant postmodern façades of Mamani's buildings (and their imitators) contrast with the raw brick and concrete of El Alto's ramshackle



architecture, and with the monochrome landscape. They tend to offend the purists of the architectural establishment in La Paz.



The owner's quarters, situated on the roof, are designed to be warmed by the sun. Central heating is still an expensive novelty in El Alto.



Ancient motifs, like the Andean Cross and zoomorphic figures from mythology, are abstracted and merged with futuristic flourishes.



Mamani's teams create the elaborate embellishments of the party halls using wire frames, plaster, and polystyrene, then paint them vividly.



The halls accommodate weddings, baptisms, and quinceañeras, which serve as mainstays of the city's social life.



BEDTIMES



BY



TIM PARKS

Monday evening, 10:30. Thomas is sitting on the sofa with his laptop, reading for work. Mary has been talking to a friend on Skype.

If he is going to work all night, I may as well go to bed, Mary decides, and goes upstairs without a word. Thomas joins her at midnight, when she is sound asleep, face to the wall.

Tuesday evening, 10:45. Mary decides that their dog, Ricky, needs a late walk. Thomas, who has been watching a Champions League game in the old playroom, wanders back to the sitting room to find it empty. If she is out with the dog, I may as well go to bed, he decides. Mary joins him at midnight, when he is sound asleep, face to the wall.

Wednesday evening, 11:00. Thomas is still out playing billiards with his friend Alan. Mary concludes that she may as well turn in and leads her dog, Ricky, up the stairs to his basket by her side of the bed. "Go to sleep now," she tells him when he puts his cold nose between the sheets. "Bed, Ricky! Bed!" Thomas joins her at 1:30, when she is sound asleep, face to the wall.

Thursday evening, 9:30. Thomas and Mary are in the sitting room reading, he on the sofa, she at her place at the table. He is reading a novel by Haruki Murakami, she a book about training cocker spaniels. Unusually, their son, Mark, comes downstairs. "It's warmer here," he says, and proceeds to open his computer to watch a film, with headphones. The boy is fourteen. Thomas looks up and says that he'd like to watch the film, too, if that's O.K. Mark tells him that he won't like the film, but Thomas says he'll give it half an hour, if that's all right. Mark says, "Fine," and unplugs the headphones. Thomas asks Mary if she would like to watch the film, too. Mary says that there isn't really room for three to watch a film on their son's laptop. Mark says that they could go and watch the film on the TV in the playroom. Mary says that it's too cold in the playroom to sit through a film and decides to take Ricky for a walk. Thomas finds the film dull, stupid, and disturbingly violent. It's nice to sit beside his son, but, at 10:30, he bails out and goes to bed. Mary joins him at 11:30, when

he is not asleep, but pretends he is, face to the wall.

Friday evening, 7:30. Mary has arranged an evening out with her friends from the dog park. She invites Thomas to come. He would enjoy meeting them, she says, and they are eager to meet him. Thomas is not convinced. He doesn't want to meet her friends from the dog park; it is not his scene. He will take Ricky out, he says, while she is at the pub. Mary says their son can take the dog out, leaving Thomas free to come to the pub and meet her friends. He repeats that it really isn't his scene. He has some work to do. In the event, he has a long conversation on Skype with an old friend. So as not to have to pretend to be asleep again, which he finds painful, he goes to bed early. Mary joins him at 11:30 and hardly cares whether he is asleep or not, since she has nothing to say to a man who she believes is having an affair.

Saturday evening. Mary says there is a good film on at the local cinema, about ten minutes away by car. She asks their daughter, Sally, who is home from university for the weekend, if she would like to go, but she wouldn't. So she asks Thomas if he would like to go. Thomas asks for some more details about the film, which she provides, and he decides that, yes, he would like to see this film, so Thomas and Mary go to the cinema and watch the film, which is called "We Need to Talk About Kevin," and both of them enjoy it, up to a point, and afterward they go to a bar and have a drink and talk for quite a long time about the film and about their children and their relationship with their children, since the film is largely about parents and the terrible mistakes you can make with your children, and both of them feel how pleasant it has been to chat together and what a good decision it was to come out together and see a film.

Back home, Mary asks Mark if he took the dog out and Mark says that he did, about two hours ago, and Mary says that, since they are back much later than she expected, she feels the dog should be taken out again for another quick walk and she keeps her coat on. She asks Thomas if he would

like to come with her to walk the dog for a few minutes, perhaps just around the block, but he says he'd better check his e-mail since there's an issue with one of his company's clients in the U.S.A. and this is prime time for people e-mailing from the U.S.A. before the end of their workday, and so she goes out alone. As it happens, there is no e-mail from the U.S.A. It's Saturday, after all. Thomas sends a few private e-mails and text messages and waits, expecting Mary to come back, but after forty minutes she is still out. Thomas feels conflicted but he decides that he may as well go to bed and is, in fact, fast asleep when his wife follows him, half an hour later. "Thomas?" she asks, checking to see if he would perhaps like to talk, but he doesn't respond, face to the wall, snoring lightly.

Sunday evenings, Thomas has always taken one or both of his children out for a burger or even to a restaurant, depending on their choice, and since his daughter is home today he takes the two of them to a burger bar. He and the children ask Mary whether she would like to come, but she says no, she doesn't really want to go and have a burger—they are so fattening. The children suggest that, in that case, she could have a salad—why not? And she says that there is no point in going out to pay for a salad that she could perfectly well have at home, so they say, "Let's go to a restaurant, then, maybe Indian or Japanese," but she says, "No, you go." She doesn't want to go out to eat, and so Thomas takes his son and daughter to the burger bar, where they chat and joke very merrily, eating burgers and drinking Coke, and afterward Thomas persuades them to go to a pub as well, so that he can have a beer, and the children discuss music and boyfriends and girlfriends and how not to get fat, despite eating burgers and drinking Coke, and Mark, who is four years younger than his sister, worries about school, and Sally worries about university, and they all have a good time laughing at some of the other people in the pub, one of whom, in particular, has an offensively loud voice, and in the end they return home around 10:30. Given the early hour, Thomas is surprised to find that Mary

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SIPR455

"I love talking to you about my problems. We should do a podcast."

• •

has already retired to bed. He sits at his computer to look at some e-mail, while his children go to the playroom to sit in the cold with a sleeping bag on their laps and watch a horror film. He smiles on hearing them giggling in there and decides to go to bed, where he finds that his wife is not sleeping with her face to the wall but reading a book.

Thomas is taken aback. "Coinciding bedtimes," she says, laughing, and there is something of a challenge in her voice. "A miracle," Thomas agrees and he undresses to his underwear and T-shirt and lies down beside her. Propped up on a pillow, she continues to read by the light of the bedside lamp. Thomas lies on his side, face toward her, watching. The air between them is tense. Thomas feels that his wife is a good-looking woman. She is aware of the pressure of his eyes on her. "How can you keep reading so many books about dogs?" he finally asks. "They're fascinating," she replies at once. "Absolutely fascinating. Aren't you, Ricky?" she addresses the dog, who is dozing in his basket and raises a silky ear. "Speaking of which," she suddenly says, "he probably needs a last pee. Poor thing." And she climbs out of bed and

pulls on her jeans. Thomas watches. He feels he should protest, but doesn't. Perhaps she is waiting for him to protest, but, if she is, she doesn't make it clear. "Do you really think he needs to go out again?" Thomas eventually asks, but it's too late, the dog is now racing around and around the room in inane canine excitement, and she is saying, "Come on. Come on, darling!" And she disappears through the door and downstairs.

Thomas lies on his back. He had a nice evening with his children, but now he feels drained and lost. He wonders, Should he wait up for his wife and confront her? But in the end it is only a passing thought. Surely it's she who should confront him. These thoughts are discouraging, and eventually he rolls over toward the wall and falls asleep. Finding him in that position forty minutes later, Mary sheds a tear or two before falling asleep herself. Another week has gone by. In the playroom, the two children are wondering whether there's anything they can do about their parents. ♦

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Tim Parks on a marriage in stalemate.

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THE CRITICS



ON TELEVISION

GRAPHIC, NOVEL

"Marvel's Jessica Jones" and the superhero survivor.

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM

I promise that I won't touch you until I get your genuine consent," the sinister Kilgrave (David Tennant) announces, on "Marvel's Jessica Jones," the latest tentacle to emerge from the Marvel universe. It's a villain's line, but one that carries a throb of multiple meanings. It's Kilgrave's vow not to hurt a woman he's already brutalized. It's delivered as a romantic seduction. And it seethes with modern ironies, as if culled from a freshman handbook aimed at preventing sexual assault.

Jessica Jones (played with a traumatized glare by Krysten Ritter) has, like her peers, supernatural gifts: extreme strength and the ability to jump enormous heights. (Her flying abilities aren't quite there yet.) But she's damaged goods, as the jerks might put it, having been scarred by her time in the good-guy business, when she was coerced into becoming Kilgrave's girlfriend. Using mind control, Kilgrave kept Jessica in a state of total submission—dressed up like a pretty trophy, exploited as a sex toy, continually smiling at his command. In the aftermath of this nightmare, she's found a gig more suited to her jaundiced mindset: noir private eye. Holed up in her apartment, binge drinking, Jessica is a hostile basket case, barely keeping her P.T.S.D. in check, while she spends her nights tracking the ugly adulteries of strangers, confirming her dark view of the world.

In this state of nihilistic freefall, she gets involved with a beautiful fellow-

superhero, Luke Cage (played by Mike Colter, best known as Lemond Bishop from "The Good Wife"—an actor with so much sexual gravity that he could be his own planet). She tests the loyalties of her oldest friend, Trish, who is a talk-show host and a former child star; she also does investigatory gigs for a corporate attorney (a nicely metallic Carrie-Anne Moss) who is going through a bitter divorce from her wife. But Kilgrave still lingers on the fringes of Jessica's life, wreaking havoc. His crimes are chilling: no matter what he says, his words get taken literally, as commands, compelling innocent people to stab themselves or to abandon their children, shove their arms into whirring blenders or never, ever blink. But it is always Jessica who is his real target, his crimes intended to send messages to her—a courtship, in his eyes.

In early episodes, Jessica is a bit of a drag: she's like the self-image of every brooding brunette, a hot punk Daria in shredded Citizens of Humanity jeans and red lipstick. But whenever the plot snaps her together with her horrifying ex it springs to life, suggesting disturbing ambiguities about the hangover of abuse. Kilgrave raped Jessica, but since he did so using mind control, rather than physical force, the scenario emerges as a plastic, unsettling metaphor, a violation that produces a sense of collusion. Mind control is a roffie, but it's also an addiction. It's mental illness; it's domestic vio-

lence. At times, the psychological scars that Kilgrave leaves on his victims, who gather in a support group, suggest the result of an extreme political ideology, the sort that might cause a soldier to commit atrocities that would never have occurred in isolation. It's any mind-set that causes you to do something against your nature—a guilty burden but also, for some, an eerie escape from responsibility. Jessica hates Kilgrave, so why, when he requests a selfie of her smiling, does she send him one? She has strategic reasons. But to the world it looks as if she were flirting—and that's what he keeps telling her, too.

It's a particularly effective form of gaslighting, since he has cast her in a popular narrative, one that shows up in many forms these days, in books and movies, and particularly in stories aimed at and embraced by female audiences. Is it really such a reach for Kilgrave to insist that Jessica will succumb to him in the end? Tweak Kilgrave's banter, and he'd be a wealthy vampire who desires Jessica above any other woman, a man who is literally irresistible, as in "Twilight." Wrench it again, and they'd be role-playing "Fifty Shades of Grey."

"I am new to love," Kilgrave tells Jessica. "But I know what it looks like. I do watch television." Much of the reason that their dynamic works is because of Tennant's sly and layered performance, which suggests a grotesque innocence beneath Kilgrave's sadism, a distorted belief that this is true romance. It's the ultimate entitlement: he deserves Jessica because he desires her, which means that her own desires are just obstacles. (He won't even take responsibility for the brainwashing, arguing that his supernatural powers are actually a burden: "I have to painstakingly choose every word I say. I once told a man to go screw himself. Can you even imagine?") At times, their relationship reminded me of the Jonathan Coulton song "Skullcrusher Mountain," in which a supervillain regards his hostage as a mysteriously recalcitrant date. "I made this half-pony, half-monkey monster to please you," he croons. "But I get the feeling you don't like it. What's with all the screaming? . . . Isn't it enough to know that I

ABOVE: JENNIFER DANIEL



Jessica Jones hates the sinister Kilgrave, so why, when he requests a selfie of her smiling, does she send him one?

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Lou Romano, June 25, 2007

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ruined a pony making a gift for you?"

Of course, a modern TV show needs to be more than go-girl feminist to be any good. (If you doubt that, check out the absolute disaster that is the pilot for Amazon's "Good Girls Revolt.") And, truth be told, "Jessica Jones" wasn't entirely my jam. It took five episodes for me to get interested—three too many, in these days of television glut. And only after the seventh and eighth did the cruel and clever plot twists (which include graphic torture) become truly gripping. In the early episodes, the pacing was logy and the action muddy, with several subplots that itched to be trimmed or recast.

Still, right away I could tell what was firing up so many viewers, particularly online: in the world of Marvel Comics, a female antihero—a female anything—is a step forward. But a rape survivor, struggling with P.T.S.D., is a genuine leap. While the fact that "Jessica Jones" is Marvel's first TV franchise starring a superpowered woman—and that it was created by a female showrunner, Melissa Rosenberg—amounts to a pretty limited sort of artistic progress, the show doesn't need to be perfect in order to deepen the debate. In a genre format that is often reflexively juvenile about sexuality, "Jessica Jones" is distinctly adult, an allegory that is unafraid of ugliness.

As I watched Jessica and Kilgrave spar, another show kept coming to mind: "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," the comic-book-inflected series that made me into a television critic, and which was airing around the same time that the original Jessica Jones comic-book series, "Alias," came out. "Buffy"'s most divisive season was its sixth, when the villains weren't the show's traditional "big bads" but extremely little ones: three comic-book-loving nerds, Warren, Jonathan, and Andrew, who began as minor characters, precisely the type of geeky guys who bicker over the merits of TV adaptations of Marvel comics. Their gang, the Trio, was a goofy lark, designed as much to catch the attention of the superpowered Buffy as it was to defeat her. Only over time did they slide, in increments, into real crimes, attempted rape and murder. And, like "Jessica Jones," the show was

less obsessed with pure-cut violent misogyny than with the queasy intersection of seduction and mind control, with fantasies about overriding consent and the excuses that abusers make for their worst acts.

On "Buffy," this coercion took many forms, using overlapping occult metaphors: there was a Buffybot sex doll, a memory-wipe magic spell, and a supernatural roofie that Warren designed to turn his ex into his sex slave. The kinky, and also mutually abusive, relationship between Buffy and her bad-boy vampire boyfriend, Spike, kept shifting back and forth in meaning, with coercion and violence, exploitation and role play, combining into a toxic mess. Many viewers resisted these plots, finding them off-putting or, as Tumblr might have phrased it had it existed in 2001, problematic. But, in retrospect, that "Buffy" season, in all its gaudy perversity, its willingness to shock, feels underestimated. On "Buffy," the truly dangerous people were the weak and resentful: that was the kind of person (often but not always a man) so ravenous for control that he'd embrace evil rather than risk rejection.

Since "Buffy" aired, more than a decade ago, that season has struck me as remarkably prescient, a rare confrontation with intractable questions of sex and power. Gamergate—the corrosive online cultural movement—might as well have been founded by the Trio. Bill Cosby is nothing if not a vampire. The on-campus movement against sexual assault lives on the fault line of these stories, with the grayer area of blackout drinking at the center of a national debate. Even the recent revelations about the "boy-next-door" porn star James Deen feel related. He has been accused both of raping his girlfriend and of manipulating the rules of consent on porn sets, enabling him to abuse women in front of an audience. It all seems like a replay of the same nightmare scenario: say yes to anything and you've signed away your right to ever say no. "I want everything to be my fault," one female character says, on "Jessica Jones." "Means I have some control." When the alternative is radical vulnerability, who can blame her? ♦

DRUNK WITH POWER

What was Prohibition really about?

BY KELEFA SANNEH



The war on alcohol united Progressives and Protestants, federal agents and Klansmen.

For much of his life, Gerrit Smith was one of the most prominent abolitionists in America, a distinction he retained until 1865, when the end of the Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, which outlawed slavery, made abolitionists obsolete. But Smith had other passions, and four years later he resurfaced in Chicago, insisting that his life's work was unfinished. The occasion was the founding of a new political party, and Smith delivered the keynote speech. "Slavery is gone," he announced. "But drunkenness stays." He suggested that this continuing form of bondage might be more miserable, and more dangerous, than the one recently abolished. "No outward advantages can bring happiness to the victim of alcohol—to him who has

killed his own soul," Smith said. "The literal slave does harm to no one, whilst the self-made slave of whom we speak is a curse to his kindred, a burden upon all, and, in no small share of the cases, a terror to all." In nineteenth-century America, the temperance speech was a common attraction on the lecture circuit. Decades before the Civil War, Lincoln had made his own contribution to the genre, calling for a "temperance revolution." But Smith didn't think that these "self-made" slaves could free themselves. The party's main plank was its support for a federal law to ban any drink that had "power to intoxicate or madden the drinker."

The Prohibition Party, as it was called, never became a major electoral force. But in 1919, exactly half a cen-

tury after the Party's founding, the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, banning "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors." National prohibition, formerly an eccentric obsession, was now enshrined at the center of America's legal system. In the fourteen years between its adoption and its repeal, in 1933, many Americans—especially those who had conducted personal research into the compatibility of happiness and intoxication—wondered how Prohibition had come to pass. And, in the decades since, not a few historians have wondered the same thing. In the influential assessment of Richard Hofstadter, Prohibition was a farce, "a means by which the reforming energies of the country were transmuted into mere peevishness." Indeed, Prohibition is remembered chiefly for its failure to achieve its aims. The Prohibition years were also the roaring twenties, the age of rakish mobsters and glamorous speakeasies, "The Great Gatsby" and "The Untouchables" and Bessie Smith singing, "Any bootlegger sure is a pal of mine." More often than not, when we think about Prohibition, we think about a time when people seemed to drink—and seemed to enjoy it—more than ever.

Lisa McGirr believes that this is a mistake. She is a historian who studies grassroots political movements in twentieth-century America, and she has concluded that our fascination with the boozy, semi-clandestine world that Prohibition created has led us to ignore its more lasting effects. In her view, Prohibition was not a farce but a tragedy, and one that has made a substantial contribution to our current miseries. In "The War on Alcohol" (Norton), she urges us to put aside our interest in the many ways involuntarily temperate citizens sought relief, so that we can consider the federal government's strenuous attempts to stop them. Her book's subtitle is "Prohibition and the Rise of the American State," and by "state" she means in particular what she calls the "penal state": the Prohibition Bureau and its many enforcers, some of them drawn from the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan; the laws and prisons required

by a federal government newly alarmed about crime; the reality of a country in which addicts were treated not as victims but as perpetrators. Prohibition was patchily enforced, and certain groups were more likely to find themselves tossed into the rough patches: "Mexicans, poor European immigrants, African-Americans, poor whites in the South." Nearly a century later, she argues, the legacy of Prohibition can be seen in our prisons, teeming with people convicted of violating neo-Prohibitionary drug laws. Many at the time viewed Prohibition as an outrage, and, in McGirr's view, we are missing its true meaning if we are not outraged, too—and ready to resist its equally oppressive descendants.

People have known since the Stone Age that sugary liquids, given time, have a salutary tendency to ferment, transforming themselves into something like beer or wine. Distillation, a more sophisticated process, was perfected only in the past few hundred years, and wherever it went it upended social customs. In "Deliver Us from Evil," a crisp history published in 1976, Norman H. Clark explained that nineteenth-century temperance movements in the U.S. distinguished gin, whiskey, and other distillates from milder beverages, which were considered part of the common diet. "Many Americans of the New Republic simply did not regard beers and wines as 'intoxicating,'" he writes. By contrast, hard liquor was prohibited in some American territory even before the country formed: in 1733, James Oglethorpe, the founding governor of the British province of Georgia, banned "the importation of ardent spirits."

In the early nineteenth century, though, the country had a vibrant distilling industry, to supply a demand that scholars have struggled to quantify, though they agree that it was enormous. By one estimate, in 1810 the average American consumed the equivalent of seven gallons of pure alcohol, three times the current level. Nineteenth-century temperance campaigners deployed a familiar cast of stock figures: starving chil-

dren, battered wives, drunks staggering and dying in the streets. (Researchers were just figuring out the science of liver failure, which bloated and killed so many heavy drinkers.) During a visit to Philadelphia, Alexis de Tocqueville was informed that, although the "lower classes" were drinking too much cheap liquor, politicians didn't dare offend their constituents by imposing heavy taxes. Tocqueville inferred, wryly, "that the drinking population constitutes the majority in your country, and that temperance is somewhat unpopular." In fact, by the time his account was published, in 1835, temperance was growing less unpopular. In Portland, Maine, a temperance activist named Neal Dow was elected mayor, and, in 1851, helped pass the so-called Maine Law, which made it illegal to make or sell intoxicating drink. Although it was repealed within a decade, it became a model for other states.

The most surprising thing about the nineteenth-century temperance movement is that it seems to have worked: in the course of the century, hard-liquor consumption plummeted. But at the same time the older, weaker stuff was making a comeback: new waves of European immigrants were turning up in saloons, where the supposed harmlessness of beer was strenuously tested. The new drinking culture inspired a radical Prohibitionism, personified by Carrie Nation, who became a national celebrity for barging into saloons and destroying them, often with a hatchet, while singing hymns. She published a vivid and dreamlike autobiography in which she fondly recalled her first saloonicide:

There was quite a young man behind the bar. I said to him: "Young man, come from behind that bar, your mother did not raise you for such a place." I threw a brick at the mirror, which was a very heavy one, and it did not break, but the brick fell and broke everything in its way. I began to look around for something that would break it. I was standing by a billiard table on which there was one ball. I said: "Thank God," and picked it up, threw it, and it made a hole in the mirror. By this time, the streets were crowded with people; most of them seemed to look puzzled. There was one boy about fifteen years old who seemed perfectly wild with joy, and he jumped,

skipped and yelled with delight. I have since thought of that as being a significant sign. For to smash saloons will save the boy.

This was a risky strategy; angry proprietors and customers sometimes returned fire. But it was based on a shrewd political calculation. The inaugural smashing took place in Kiowa, Kansas, in 1900, twenty years after the state had adopted a constitutional amendment banning "intoxicating liquors." The saloon in Kiowa, like all the saloons in Kansas, was violating the law, and Carrie Nation realized that the police couldn't arrest her without acknowledging their own negligence. She was angry at the saloons that were, she held, filling up the jails and the morgues, but her real target was a government that was failing to do what it had promised.

Who were the Prohibitionists? Many of the leaders were, as McGirr acknowledges, Progressives, engaged in a broad and idealistic project of reform. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, founded in 1873, fought for both Prohibition and women's suffrage. (One early volunteer was Carrie Nation.) Its president, Frances Willard, said that she wanted to help women protect themselves, and their homes, against drunkenness and vice. Many supporters of the Eighteenth Amendment also supported, a year later, the Nineteenth Amendment, an equally controversial measure, which established women's right to vote. The Prohibition movement was also partly a good-government movement, and the saloons it targeted were associated not only with disorderly drunkenness but with big-city corruption—saloons were where the local political bosses held court, doing private favors with public money. McGirr has some sympathy for the Progressives, and she imagines an alternate history in which these enlightened Prohibitionists devised "liquor-control laws more in line with the measures introduced by other industrializing nations." In Sweden, the government rationed alcohol for decades; Australia ordered bars to close by six o'clock.

In the event, Progressives were

joined and sometimes upstaged by a complicated cast of allies, all with different reasons to believe that banning alcohol would restore the country. Prohibition was a profoundly Christian movement, delivering its message in the language of revivalism. But there were Christians on both sides: where many Baptists and Methodists saw Prohibition as a strike against depravity, Catholics perceived it as an attack on their communities, not to mention their Communion wine. Southern states were drier than Northeastern ones, middle classes were drier than working classes, and Americans with deep roots were drier than recent arrivals. These disparate factions were held together by a relentless lobbyist named Wayne Wheeler, the leader of the Anti-Saloon League, who realized that politicians' fear of Prohibitionist anger might outweigh their disinclination to act decisively on an issue that divided both parties.

Prohibitionism, with its focus on the saloons and the immigrants who populated them, was propelled by no small amount of ethnic nationalism. (McGirr notes that in 1910 more than four in ten residents of New York City were foreign-born—slightly higher even than today.) McGirr is unsparing in her analysis of the pre-occupations that underlay the resistance to alcohol. She quotes Charles Eliot, the president of Harvard, who was convinced that “alcoholism threatens the destruction of the white race.” Elizabeth Tilton, a wellborn and influential suffragist and Prohibitionist, was particularly concerned about the price that alcoholism exacted from poor immigrants, who “thought little but acted rashly.” In Tilton, McGirr diagnoses a barely disguised and mean-spirited status anxiety. She writes that Tilton, and others like her, “sought to buttress their previous easy dominance against an ever more pluralist, urban, and proletarian nation.” And it is true that most Prohibitionists supported the 1924 Immigration Act, which set national quotas designed to limit the number of new arrivals judged undesirable—but then so did nearly everybody else. In the meantime, many of the Prohibition-

ist leaders expressed an earnest—and characteristically Progressive—desire to help those who seemed, to them, insufficiently progressed. William Allen White, a paragon of Progressivism, stated the movement's credo memorably, and revealingly: “We believed faithfully that if we could only change the environment of the under dog, give him a decent kennel, wholesome food, regular baths, properly directed exercise, cure his mange and abolish his fleas, and put him in the blue-ribbon class, all would be well.”

At times, the Prohibitionists permitted themselves to express their frustration in less conciliatory terms. McGirr quotes Frances Willard, the W.C.T.U. president, who sometimes described her political opponents as crude invaders. “Alien illiterates rule our cities today,” she wrote. “The saloon is their place; the toddy stick their scepter.” McGirr cites this, persuasively, as proof that Prohibition was “imbued with a deeply antidemocratic impulse.” In the Presidential campaign of 1928, Al Smith, the anti-Prohibition governor of New York, lost in a landslide to Herbert Hoover,

in an election that functioned partly as a referendum on Smith's Catholic faith—opponents accused him of supporting “rum and Romanism.” In many cases, the high-minded Progressives and anti-“alien” sloganeers weren't merely awkward allies but the same people.

When federal Prohibition finally arrived, it was disguised as a program of wartime austerity. In 1917, as the country entered the First World War, Congress banned distillation, in order to conserve food, and restricted the grain available to brewers, eventually limiting their beer to no more than 2.75 per cent alcohol. These measures helped make Prohibition seem both feasible and patriotic, especially since the brewers who supplied the saloons were largely German-American. No less important, the Sixteenth Amendment, adopted in 1913, established a national income tax; until then, as much as thirty per cent of federal revenue had come from excise taxes on alcohol.

Woodrow Wilson, the President, was a Democrat, and his party was



“Are you familiar with the poetry of John Donne?”

divided on Prohibition, so he was not eager to divide it further by taking a firm stand. Not that it mattered: modifying the Constitution does not require the President's approval, and in some histories the passage of Prohibition can seem slightly anticlimactic. The Eighteenth Amendment passed easily in the Senate and the House, and was soon approved by every state except Rhode Island. This quick success came as a shock even to the Prohibitionists, who were just settling in for a struggle that might, they thought, consume the rest of their lives.

Prohibition took effect in January, 1920, and, all at once, people really did stop drinking, at least for a time. In "Last Call," a witty popular history of the Prohibition era, published in 2010, Daniel Okrent chronicled the country's six-month infatuation with nonalcoholic beer, and its longer relationships with other substitutes. Sales of Coca-Cola increased, and some Protestants took dry Communion with the aid of a new product called Dr. Welch's Unfermented Wine, which would be familiar to any modern toddler. Understandably, though, Okrent spent much of his book chronicling the manifold and ingenious ways that Americans ward off sobriety. In New York, attendance soared at synagogues offering "Kosher Wine for Sacramental Purposes"—the predecessors, perhaps, of the California medical-marijuana clinics currently treating a suspiciously hale group of patients. Small boats raced across the Detroit River from Canada; big ships hosted revelry offshore from East Coast cities, beyond the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard. Enterprising vintners sold grapes directly to customers and also provided them with grape-crushing services, to facilitate home fermentation. Rural bootleggers and urban speakeasies helped the country adapt, too; the change of circumstance helped convert American drinkers to gin, because it was easy to produce, and it also made them more brand-conscious, in the hope of avoiding li-

quor that was weak or poisonous or, in the worst case, both.

McGirr wants us to remember that these new patterns of consumption emerged only among those who could afford them; according to one study she cites, "drinking among workers was cut by half," and research suggests that Prohibition did indeed cause a meaningful decline in alcohol-related deaths and illnesses.



Many Negro leaders supported temperance and, to a lesser extent, Prohibition, although most of them renounced it as they discovered what it would entail. The speakeasies of Harlem helped spark a cultural renaissance, but they were viewed more skeptically by many lo-

cals, who resented the way the police allowed their neighborhood to become a locus of lawless fun. An editorial in a black newspaper complained that Harlem was now "a modern-day plantation for white thrill-seekers." McGirr argues that Prohibition showed that the police would allow "vice" to flourish in "areas of the city without weighty protectors"—the same process by which, in the decades that followed, drug dealers were allowed to operate in many of the same vulnerable neighborhoods. In the South, raids often targeted Negroes and poor whites. Using records from Virginia, McGirr finds some evidence that race played a role in who was arrested; she also concludes that the government's heavy-handed tactics alienated many white citizens who weren't wealthy or lucky enough to be left alone. The *Richmond Planet*, a black newspaper in Virginia, noted with some satisfaction that "the same treatment that has been accorded to black citizens for more than a decade in the matter of Constitutional rights and privileges is now being meted to white citizens."

The paradox of Prohibition was that it required intrusive enforcement from a government equipped to deliver only sporadic interventions; the results could be both ineffective and brutal. The Prohibition Unit, a new agency within the U.S. Treasury, was

given only three thousand employees, which was a small number relative to the size of the country but a big one relative to the size of the federal government—at the time, the agency that became the Federal Bureau of Investigation had only six hundred employees. Federal Prohibition agents sometimes increased their ranks by deputizing volunteers, including members of the Ku Klux Klan, who found the battle to enforce Prohibition consistent with their broader mission to purify the nation. In 1923, in Williamson County, Illinois, hundreds of enforcers, many of them Klansmen, began a series of violent raids on distilleries, bars, and private homes, in which several hundred people were arrested and more than a dozen were killed.

Three Republican Presidents—Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Hoover—held office during Prohibition, and all of them were willing, if not eager, to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment. (During the 1928 Presidential campaign, Hoover issued an exquisitely equivocal pronouncement: "Our country has deliberately undertaken a great social and economic experiment, noble in motive and far-reaching in purpose. It must be worked out constructively.") As bootleggers and smugglers took control of the alcohol industry, crime increased, or seemed to—breathless news reports about brazen gangsters left an exaggerated impression of the uptick in violence. McGirr notes that Hoover was the first President to mention crime in his Inaugural Address, which helped establish the idea, now commonplace, that law enforcement was a matter of urgent federal concern. The response was the construction of a bigger, more sophisticated, more intrusive federal criminal-justice system. J. Edgar Hoover got the money and the impunity to build his F.B.I.; the government established a national archive of criminals' fingerprints; overwhelmed prosecutors learned to use plea bargaining to avoid trials; the Supreme Court ruled that government agents didn't need a warrant to conduct wiretaps. McGirr views these and other developments as reactions to the "extreme stress"

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caused by Prohibition, a big task that made the federal government suddenly seem small.

This is a provocative thesis, especially in the light of what happened next. In 1932, Hoover, the reluctant Prohibitionist, was defeated by Franklin D. Roosevelt, a reluctant anti-Prohibitionist; a year later, the country repealed the Eighteenth Amendment. Conventional accounts trace the metastasis of the federal government not to what came before Roosevelt's election but to what came after. Roosevelt's New Deal sought to modernize and enlarge all of government, including the F.B.I., which he promised to make "as effective an instrumentality of crime detection and punishment as any of the similar agencies in the world." McGirr wants us to see Prohibition as a prelude, "helping to shape the New Deal order." This is indisputable, in that any era helps shape the one that follows, but it is also indisputable that Roosevelt was elected by a public that had grown to despise mandatory temperance. Some Prohibition-era innovations surely endured in spite of their pedigree, not because of it. Government programs, once established, do not tend to disestablish themselves, but the growth and modernization of the federal government was probably inevitable. If "extreme stress" was the necessary precondition, the twentieth century provided no shortage of it.

In 1933, the country's Prohibitionists had to grapple with a political fate worse than failure: oblivion. Their solution had been tried and rejected, which meant that it could never be tried again. McGirr gleefully reproduces Elizabeth Tilton's pronouncement, from her diary: "Civilization is undone." Some of the old warriors kept the faith. (The Prohibition Party never disbanded, and held its most recent convention in July, by conference call; Gerrit Smith doubtless would have been more impressed by the technology than by the turnout, which was eleven.) Others found new outlets for their old passions. McGirr tells the story of Richmond Hobson, an anti-saloon activist who reinvented himself, during

the Prohibition years, as an anti-drug activist. In 1922, Congress passed a law that banned various narcotics, a prohibition that endured when the other one ended. For McGirr, the war on drugs is Prohibition's true legacy. Its toll and its continuing persistence help explain the urgency of her tone: she wants to make us see not just what we once did but what we are doing still, in a misguided effort to prohibit substances no more eradicable—and not necessarily more harmful—than alcohol. Even now, rethinking the war on drugs typically means rethinking marijuana, rather than rethinking the general concept of banning mood-altering substances. In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio pledged to stop arresting people for possessing small amounts of marijuana, but he also signed a new law to criminalize a class of synthetic drugs known as K2.

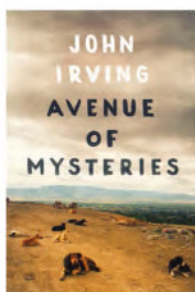
One quality that McGirr shares with some of the historians she criticizes is a tendency to downplay the threat posed by alcohol. At times, her book makes it easy to forget that the Prohibitionists had good reason to associate alcohol with violence and misery and death; one needn't have been a saloon smasher or a xenophobe to conclude that the country would have been a lot better off if it had been a little drier. A hundred years later, news outlets regularly raise the alarm about the K2 craze, or opioid abuse, or the latest resurgence of crystal methamphetamine—drugs that cause a small fraction of the mayhem that alcohol caused, and continues to cause. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that excessive drinking is implicated in ten per cent of deaths among working-age people. Alcohol is a factor in about a third of all violent crimes. And, despite decades of public-awareness campaigns and enforcement efforts, drunk driving still kills dozens of Americans every day.

Part of the problem with thinking about Prohibition is that the fact of its evident unsustainability tends to overwhelm everything else about it; even McGirr sometimes struggles to make her characters seem sensible enough to be taken seriously. The temptation is to compare Prohibition

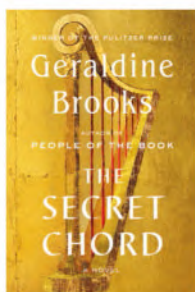
to whatever new movement seems silly or futile. Seven years ago, the Los Angeles City Council engaged in its own effort to provide "wholesome food" to "the under dog," banning most new fast-food restaurants from opening in South Los Angeles, a largely Latino and African-American area that was judged to have poor eating habits. (A recent study found that obesity rates kept rising anyway.) More recently, New York tried to ban big cups of soda, a law that became such a punch line that it seemed almost mean-spirited when an appeals court struck it down.

But, of course, Prohibition didn't seem frivolous at the time—if the comparison to abolitionism seems bizarre today, that should tell us something about how difficult it is to make accurate historical judgments when we are engulfed in debate. Campaigners who talked about death and destruction weren't being hyperbolic: alcohol kills and destroys. To find a contemporary analogue, we should look at our most bitter and divisive political disagreements: the abortion wars, or—especially recently—the ongoing arguments over gun regulation. The country seems to be living through a gun-violence epidemic, even if the statistics are more complicated than the headlines suggest. (There are about thirty thousand gun-related deaths per year in America—and about ninety thousand alcohol-related deaths.) Now, as then, people are accused of defending the indefensible—after all, there is no good rationale for the consumption of whiskey, although there are plenty of good occasions—and people on the other side are accused of misjudging what government can and should do. The lesson of Prohibition is not that every grand crusade is a mistake; it's that, from zero feet away, it can be difficult to tell the difference between an idea as bad as the Eighteenth Amendment and one as good as the Nineteenth Amendment—or, as the example of Gerrit Smith illustrates, the Thirteenth. We can be sure that there are neo-Prohibitionists among us today, intent on making things better by making them worse. But we can't be sure who they are. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED



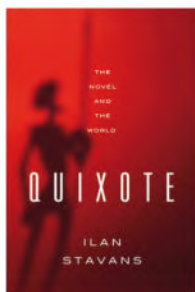
AVENUE OF MYSTERIES, by John Irving (Simon & Schuster). In Irving's fourteenth novel, Juan Diego Guerrero, an acclaimed middle-aged writer, takes a trip to the Philippines to honor a promise he made as a child. Guerrero is famous enough to attract a band of well-meaning fans and caretakers throughout his muddled trek; his main difficulty is remembering his medication. The most vivid passages are dreamlike flashbacks to his adolescence in Mexico, as a dump-picker scavenging for books and, later, as part of a ragtag circus. In both time lines, Irving's characters grapple with faith and with the Catholic Church. Guerrero's sister Lupe asserts, "We are the miracle—you and me. Not them. Just us."



THE SECRET CHORD, by Geraldine Brooks (Viking). This retelling of the story of the Biblical David, by a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, follows his rise to power through the eyes of Natan, a seer and royal adviser, who is compiling an account of the King's life. The picture that emerges is dramatic—midrash meets "Game of Thrones"—and often salacious. (The young David's relationship with Yonatan, Shaul's son, is described in sexually explicit terms.) Brooks also misses no opportunity to darken our view of the King of Israel, recasting the infatuation with Batsheva as a matter of rape rather than of seduction. She renders David's character with complexity and shows how his flaws and his hard-heartedness nonetheless make him a terrifyingly effective ruler.



LADY BYRON AND HER DAUGHTERS, by Julia Markus (Norton). Although mad, bad Byron remains a rich vein for biographers, the subject of this book is not the poet but his wife, Annabella. Attacked by Byron and demonized by generations of his admirers as "a virtuous monster," Annabella emerges here as a kind, intelligent, and forceful presence who deftly maneuvered her way out of an abusive marriage. She brought up one daughter (the genius mathematician Ada), adopted another (Medora, fathered by Byron with his sister), and founded the first "infant" school in England. If the poet's star sinks as Annabella's rises, Markus's account establishes that the reappraisal is long overdue.



QUIXOTE, by Ilan Stavans (Norton). This year marks the four-hundredth anniversary of the second and final volume of Cervantes's epochal work, "Don Quixote." In this wide-ranging appreciation, Stavans, a scholar of Latin-American literature, assesses the enduring appeal of a book that has influenced such disparate writers as Dostoyevsky and Mark Twain, as well as non-writers, including George Washington. Stavans examines his own reactions: he admits to early frustrations with the work, but extolls its value as a compendium of fictional technique. Despite the book's unassailable status today, it was not well appreciated in Cervantes's era, thanks to its nonsensical structure, rambling diction, and multiple exclamations. Stavans points out that these are precisely the features that have made it a handbook for wayward thinkers ever since.



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SHADES OF WHITE

A Robert Ryman retrospective.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

*Ryman's "Arrow" (1976). The Dia show is a spiritual time capsule.*

A succinct retrospective of twenty-two works by Robert Ryman has just opened at the Dia Art Foundation in Chelsea, and it offers a tacit reproach to today's art-world circus. Ryman, now eighty-five, has been making all-white abstract paintings, in square formats of different sizes, for most of the past six decades. He appeals more to cognoscenti than to popular audiences, but no museum collection of painting since the nineteen-sixties can be authoritative without an example of his work. His art's phlegmatic allure involves qualities of different paint mediums, applied dead smooth or textured by brushstrokes, on canvas, board, paper, aluminum, and other surfaces. At times, the main—or, really, only—event is an emphasis on the way a work is attached to a wall: by bolts, staples, brackets, or

flanges. Always, Ryman invites contemplation of the light that falls on his paintings (which when I saw them, on a recent cloudy day, was glumly tender as it filtered through the Dia skylights) and of their formal relation to the rooms that contain them. There's no savoring of style, just stark presentation. His work's economy and quietness may be pleasing, but its chief attraction is philosophical. What is a painting? Are there values inherent in the medium's fundamental givens—paint skin, support surface, wall—when they are denied traditional decorative and illustrative functions? Such questions absorb Ryman. Do they excite you? Your answer might betray how old you are.

Ryman is rooted in a phase of artistic sensibility that was coincident with early minimalism and Pop, and

is still in need of a name. Call it the Age of Paying Attention, or the Noticing Years, or the Not So Fast Era. American art underwent convulsive changes in the late nineteen-fifties and early sixties, following the triumph and swift decline of Abstract Expressionism. A vast cohort of young artists and intellectuals, many of them academically trained, flooded into formerly patrician or bohemian scenes. To qualify as hip, you registered fine distinctions—between a photograph of Marilyn Monroe and Andy Warhol's silkscreen of a photograph of her, say, or between Carl Andre's stack of bricks on a gallery floor and a stack of bricks anywhere else. Skeptical attitudes, averse to mimesis and metaphor, put a withering pressure on painting, including even the simplest abstraction. Barely passing muster were the evenly pencilled grids of Agnes Martin, the broody monochromes of Brice Marden, and Ryman's taciturn brushstrokes. What you saw, while not a lot, stayed seen. The mental toughness that defined sophistication in art back then is rare now. Ryman's Dia show is a spiritual time capsule. The work isn't dated, exactly; it seems classical. But what's missing is a confident assumption that there will be an audience eager to put up with it.

Ryman came to his vocation indirectly. When he arrived in New York, in 1952, from his native Tennessee, it was with a saxophone and the ambition to be a professional jazz musician. (He took lessons from the pianist Lennie Tristano.) At first just to support himself, and then with a growing fascination, he worked as a guard at the Museum of Modern Art, from 1953 to 1960. His co-workers included the future leading minimalists Dan Flavin and Sol LeWitt. He also met and became friends with Roy Lichtenstein. The earliest of Ryman's paintings in the show, made in 1958, are small, awkward, oddly charming arrangements of impasto strokes, which have a generic look of expressive painting—at a time when the swashbuckling style of Willem de Kooning was much in fashion—but are as matter-of-fact as cards laid out for solitaire. Ryman was likely affected by Jasper Johns's recent, sensational "Flags" and "Targets," in which

COURTESY ROBERT RYMAN / ARS, NY AND THE GREENWICH COLLECTION; PHOTOGRAPH: BILL JACOBSON

sensitive-looking touches of thick paint wander like sheep without a shepherd. Other artists, too, were mocking Abstract Expressionism's painterly rhetoric. Robert Rauschenberg did it by repeating the same spontaneous-looking strokes on twin canvases, "Factum I" and "Factum II" (1957).

But Ryman eschewed imagery and any apparent irony. There was, as there remains, something monkish about his submission to austere forms and procedures. For a while, in the early sixties, he flirted with color and with mildly decorative effects, such as layering whites atop reds and blues. It was as if he were straining against a principled compunction and toward an indulgence in the hedonistic rewards of painting. That stopped in the late sixties, with a double commitment to whites and to treating paintings as self-evident objects. I well remember the pleasant shock of his show at Virginia Dwan's gallery, on Fifty-seventh Street, in 1971, of identically big, square, white paintings on sheets of vinyl, which were held to the wall by paint that ran over their edges. (Tiny blank patches showed, where pieces of masking tape had secured the vinyl while the paint dried.) It was like entering a luminous fog bank in which nothing—except everything—was palpable. Under its spell, you could deem even the most astringent works of other artists fatally fussy.

The Dia show is a career sampler, which means that it lacks the engulfing experience of Ryman shows that present series of closely related works en masse, with a practically chapel-like air of consecration to some mysterious ideal. I can imagine a devotee of Ryman visiting Dia twenty-two times, to give each of the paintings, in turn, an hour of undistracted communion. As it is, you hopscotch themes, with variants of tone, including the majestic—as in "Counsel" (1982), a large, densely brushed canvas, held out from the wall by steel fasteners—and the bizarre, as in "Pair Navigation" (1984/2002), which incorporates a painting on fibreglass mounted, horizontally, on a table-like, wood-and-metal structure that projects from the wall. If I could have one work from the show, to satisfy my somewhat equivocal appetite for Rymanism, it would be the delicately befudd-

ling "Arista" (1968), a six-foot-square painting on unstretched linen, which is stapled to the wall and abutted, on the wall, by ruled lines in blue chalk. The lines suggest a guide to placement, but there they are in place, themselves, as the most interesting feature of the work. The particular meaning, if any, of a Ryman commonly tiptoes just out of mental reach.

Back on the philosophical front: What is white? As light, it is the apparent no-color that contains all colors except its antithetical no-color, black. But, as pigmentation, it rarely lacks some ghostly tint, and it is never without relative tone. (Juxtapose any two whites and watch one turn gray.) Ryman generally favors cool whites, whispering of blue. A warm-white painting, "Untitled" (1973), jumps out in the show like a sunflower on fire—if, that is, you have spent enough time for your perception to adjust, like eyes in the dark, to the pitch of excruciating discrimination that Ryman demands. The exercise may offer its own reward, refining the viewer's eye and mind, but it comes with ponderous intellectual baggage. Ryman's reductions of painting to basic protocols are engaging only to the extent that you regard painting as an art that is both inherently important and circumstantially in crisis. You must buy into an old story, which bears on Ryman's extreme, peculiarly sacramental standing in the history of taste.

Ryman's is a kind of mute art that, generating reverent and brainy chatter, puts uninitiated citizens in mind of the emperor's new clothes. (I have in hand, as tinder for such derision, "Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967," a thick volume of often gruellingly dense essays.) Yet, actually, the populist fable rather befits the serious aims of Ryman and his avant-garde generation, who insisted on something very like full-frontal nudity in artistic intentions. The emperor—roughly, high-modernist faith in art's world-changing mission—could retain fealty only if stripped of fancy styles and sentimental excuses. That was Ryman's formative moment. It was succeeded by a suspicion, now amounting to a resigned conviction, that contemporary art is an industry producing just clothes, with no ruling authority inside them. ♦

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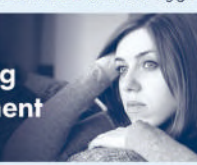


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STATIC

David Bowie and "Lazarus."

BY HILTON ALS



Bowie on the set of the 1976 film adaptation of "The Man Who Fell to Earth."

I grew up, musically speaking, in a fairly segregated world. I didn't come across "white" music—folk, stadium rock, New Wave, and so on—until I was in my late teens, which was when I first heard David Bowie; one of my sisters had his superb 1976 album, "Station to Station." Playing the record, over and over again, I focussed less on Bowie's famous alienation—the alienation that informed his personae Ziggy Stardust, the Thin White Duke, and others—than on his warmth. He sang beautifully and dramatically about what a lot of singer-songwriters sing about: love. Still, Bowie was different. Love made him feel strange and connected and then nothing at all. But so did cocaine, sounds, fast cars, words, fame, fashion—all of which he treated as entities, like people. On his best records, you could hear modernism at work. Like Marcel Duchamp, he didn't so much differentiate between high and low subject matter as play with the destabilizing force of presentation: he knew that you could get away with anything if you balanced the weird abrasiveness of the new with the calm of classicism.

Like an actor (and some of the black performers I admired), Bowie seemed to

work from the outside in—creating stage pictures that sometimes worked in tandem with the words, sometimes not. For rock purists, his attention to exteriors diminished his credibility and read as dandyism—a lipstick smear on rock's machismo. Writing in this magazine, in 1972, the critic Ellen Willis cast a supportive but cold eye on the performer:

What Bowie offers is not "decadence" (sorry, Middle America) but a highly professional pop surface with a soft core: under that multicolored Day-Glo frogman's outfit lurks the soul of a folkie who digs Brel, plays an (amplified) acoustic guitar, and sings with a catch in his voice about the downfall of the planet.

When the director Ivo van Hove used several Bowie songs in his staging of Tony Kushner's AIDS epic, "Angels in America," at BAM last year, it was the warmth and sincerity that Willis notes that shone through the sadness of the show, which was extraordinary and left me feeling wounded, my throat tight with all the goodbyes I managed to say and did not say during the years Kushner was writing about. (By stripping the play of all its usual gimmickry, the production's designer, Jan Versweyveld, made a vista filled

with grief, humor, and loneliness.) As Kushner's characters talked about how they met or fell in love, van Hove sometimes projected images of a sunset on Fire Island—a meeting place for so many gay men. The images were shot from a distance, like memories, and to those memories he added the nostalgia that came from hearing Bowie's "Golden Years" or "The Man Who Sold the World": melancholy white soul music that connoted good times, and then the end of good times. After that wonder of a show closed, van Hove and Bowie were said to be collaborating on a new work, "Lazarus," which Bowie had co-written with the Irish playwright Enda Walsh. I, for one, couldn't wait. I wish I had.

The set for "Lazarus" (now at New York Theatre Workshop) has the look of an incubator, with musicians positioned behind two glass panels separated by a video monitor. (The set and the lighting design are by Versweyveld.) At first, we see only static on the screen, then it and the surrounding walls are filled with TV images: politicians pontificating, housewives and kids smiling, products being sold. Thomas Newton (Michael C. Hall) is the baby who dominates this controlled environment, and gin is his mother's milk. Watching TV and walking unsteadily from the sleeping area in his New York apartment to the fridge, where he grabs another bottle, is all he can manage, that and occasionally singing Bowie songs, such as "Lazarus," that tell us something about his ennui:

Look up here, I'm in heaven
I've got scars that can't be seen
I've got drama, can't be stolen
Everybody knows me now . . .
By the time I got to New York
I was living like a king
Then I used up all my money . . .
Ain't that just like me.

A kind of post-Sondheim protagonist, Newton is built, it seems, to feel nothing, or to neutralize everything that might cause feeling—or interest us. After a while, he is visited by an old associate named Michael (the sexy and authoritative Charlie Pollock), a stiff-backed alpha male and committed capitalist in a natty suit. Michael can't believe that Newton would willingly give up his position as a businessman of the first order to become a semi-recluse, nursing wounds that come from—who knows? All we know for a

STEVE SCHAPIRO AND FAHEY/KLEIN

while is that Newton is spiritually dead, a Lazarus who cannot rise to life, let alone the kind of life the stage demands.

After Michael leaves, we listen to Newton's assistant, Elly (Cristin Milioti), and her husband, Zach (Bobby Moreno), who is jealous of Elly's relationship with her employer and confronts her about it:

ZACH: Do you think being an assistant will fulfill you?

ELLY: I know you think my résumé's been written by squirrels—while your love of Information Technology has been handed down from Moses. Will it “fulfill” me? The suggestion is—of course it won't—well, maybe it will, Zach.

ZACH: Right, maybe it will—I hope it does.

ELLY: And why do you hope that?

ZACH: Because I want my wife to be fulfilled—obviously not fulfilled with Thomas Fucking Newton.

This is some of the more scintillating dialogue in this intermissionless two-hour production, from which the drama has been bled out. Van Hove's stage is a void. As the minutes tick on, it becomes more and more obvious that we cannot be actively engaged by Zach and Elly, let alone by Newton and Michael, because none of them have an inner life: Bowie and Walsh and van Hove didn't imagine one for them. After Zach and Elly's forced and artificial quarrel, Newton beats his fist against a wall and sings Bowie's “It's No Game (Part 1),” a great tune, full of aural and emotional dissonance. But why Newton sings the song at this point isn't clear—unless, of course, he can plug into Zach and Elly's argument telepathically?

The script of “Lazarus” was inspired by Walter Tevis's 1963 novel, “The Man Who Fell to Earth,” about a “humanoid alien” who lands in post-Eisenhower Kentucky in search of the water he needs to save his drought-ridden planet. It doesn't take long for Newton's superior intelligence to be discovered in that conformist milieu, where everyone and everything is average. After a while, he becomes the enormously wealthy head of a technology conglomerate. Even as he is caught up in the trappings of earthly success, though, Newton longs for the difference he calls home. When Bowie played Newton, in Nicolas Roeg's 1976 film adaptation, he gave a creepily brilliant and precise performance, drawing on the alienation that he no doubt felt from his own body: during that period, he was heavily addicted to cocaine.

Hall is dedicated, too, but, like most actors without the support of a real script, he overacts to compensate. Van Hove has a considerable reputation as a theatre artist who “writes” his shows, that is, as someone whose vision is as important as the text itself, but in this case he allowed the production to proceed without a workable text. Van Hove has said that Bowie is one of his favorite artists, and perhaps that was intimidating: how can you reinvent your idol? Instead, he goes along with the nonsense that Bowie and Walsh have halfheartedly dreamed up, including Teenage Girls (Krystina Alabado, Krista Pioppi, Brynn Williams), who sometimes wear masks and sing backup for Newton for no reason whatsoever. Then, there's Girl (Sophia Anne Caruso), who has long blond hair and wears white and represents purity with a capital “P.” When she's not onstage, she's on video, running through darkness, presumably toward Newton, who dreams of returning to space.

By the time Newton does leave and the stage goes black, the theatre is filled with incomprehension, an unsatisfied sourness, and the pretentious posturing of those who believe they have grasped the meaning of the play. As a director, van Hove has made an essential interpretive mistake: he's gone for the “cold,” “alien” Bowie of the Roeg film, as opposed to Bowie the storyteller, the warm wizard whose songs brought so much not only to “Angels in America” but to the pop world. As a co-author, Bowie has made the mistake of believing that a theatre piece can be as sketchy as a song. Like a number of other rock musicians whose hits have stopped coming, Bowie perhaps thought that he could remake himself as a playwright—or something. (Green Day, Sting, and U2 have all tackled Broadway with some degree of success.) He chose to work with a director who is known for his self-conscious avant-gardism—a “real” artist who defies the conventional. But, by disavowing the conventional so strenuously, Bowie, with Walsh and van Hove, has made a show that's actually old-fashioned at heart, less rock-and-roll rebellious than anything he ever did on his own. It's as if he'd forgotten that, as a younger artist, he made theatre that was unlike anyone else's. His script back then was his beauty and his warmth and his ability to make us believe any story that he felt was worth telling. ♦

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DEEP AND DARK

"In the Heart of the Sea" and "Son of Saul."

BY ANTHONY LANE



Ron Howard's new movie reimagines the ill-fated voyage of a whaling ship.

The new Ron Howard film, "In the Heart of the Sea," is based not on "Moby-Dick" but on one of the true stories on which "Moby-Dick" is based. This sets a worrying trend. If Hollywood producers decide that, having exhausted so many major novels, they can start plundering the source material, we are in for a long haul. A woman named Delphine Delamare is said to have given rise to Emma Bovary, for instance, but could there be other contenders? How many bio-pics of adulterous French housewives can we take?

The movie is touchingly explicit about how to write an epic novel. If you are Herman Melville (Ben Whishaw), say, you show up one night at the home of Thomas Nickerson (Brendan Gleeson). He is a survivor of the Essex, a whaling ship that set off from Nantucket in 1819 and never came back, having been wrecked by a white whale in the Pacific—more desert than sea, as Nickerson recalls. He was then a boy of fourteen (Tom Holland), and the trauma of those events has vexed him ever since. By recounting them, not only does he assuage the pain; he

is also paid by Melville, who, amply and sufficiently inspired, goes away to compose his book. Easy.

The meat of the film, then, belongs to the voyage of the Essex. The captain is a tyro named George Pollard (Benjamin Walker), who got the job because of his moneyed father. Up against Pollard is the more seasoned Owen Chase (Chris Hemsworth), the first mate, who hails from poor farming stock and is not allowed to forget it. Primed by "Moby-Dick," we brace ourselves for a clash of sovereign wills, but, as with so much in the movie, the setup peters out. Only once does Howard reap a fitting whirlwind, as Pollard, displaying poor seamanship and ignoring Chase's advice, leads his vessel into the maw of a storm.

The pacing here is certainly forceful, as it is during the harrying and the slaughter of a sperm whale, and yet the force lacks clarity. This is partly because computer-generated waves never quite buffet us with the slap of the real thing, and also because, in the twenty years since Howard made his finest film, "Apollo 13," something has happened

to the editing of action sequences. No longer, it seems, are we required to know who is doing what, and where, at any given point. What matters is that the frenzy of the occasion should be matched by the drubbing of the images, which must pelt us without pity or interruption. Just to crank up the turmoil, "In the Heart of the Sea" can be seen in 3-D, so that masts and braces keep poking you in the nose. Nothing in the hunt is as memorable as the blessed pause that comes in its wake, as the wounded whale sprays blood through its blowhole, and Thomas's awestruck face is dusted with a rain of red. The camera stays with him, and justly so. You can feel his very boyhood being washed away.

And so, around the Horn, into the kingdom of the white whale—a patched and piebald beast, which has clearly been told by its agent that it can look forward to a long and fabulous career as the world's largest metaphor. I relished the smack of its humongous tail, which sends a wall of water coursing into the lens, and Chase's sighting of his prize. "As I live and breathe, he's mine!" he cries, harpoon in hand. If only Chris Hemsworth's voice were as beefy as his build; for the full effect, we need the rich and prophetic intonations of Charlton Heston, or the salt-encrusted growl of Robert Shaw, in "Jaws." Shaw steered closer to Captain Ahab than either Hemsworth or Walker does, and the new film barely grazes the madness, let alone the rhetorical surge, of "Moby-Dick"—"the great flood-gates of the wonder-world," as Ishmael calls them. If you want a Ron Howard movie about a man obsessed with a creature from the deep, "In the Heart of the Sea," sadly, is not the place to start. Try "Splash."

Birdsong, and a blur of greenery. That is what we see and hear as "Son of Saul" begins, and we should treasure the moment while it lasts, because the rest of the tale—every beat of its hundred and seven minutes—eradicats any hint of calmness or peace. The release of László Nemes's dumbfounding film in time for the Oscar nominations makes sense; the fact that it should descend upon us during the festive season, however, is an irony that sticks in the craw.

The setting is unnamed, although if you were to think of it as Auschwitz-Birkenau you would not be wrong. To be exact, we are in the netherworld of the Sonderkommando, those prisoners, mostly Jewish, whose task was to assist with the disposal of other prisoners when they reached the death camps. This activity was itself performed under sentence of death: if you were picked to participate, you could not refuse, and at regular intervals a Sonderkommando squad would be exterminated and replaced by another, not least because its members were *Geheimnisträger*—"bearers of secrets," as Nemes informs us, in a note, at the beginning. They could not be permitted to reveal, especially to new arrivals, what they knew.

The focus of the film is, in every sense, on Saul Ausländer (Géza Röhrig), a Hungarian Jew who works in a Sonderkommando. He appears in almost every shot, drawing and compelling our attention. When he hefts a corpse, we watch the lifter rather than the load. We grow accustomed to the back of his head, and to the rough red "X" that is daubed on the rear of his jacket as a sign of his duties. Largely, though, what the camera dwells upon is his face—sharp and stilled, the eyes set deep under the eaves of his brow, which wears a permanent frown. Note the precise angle of his gaze, aimed downward at thirty degrees from the horizontal, when there are Nazis present; to meet *their* gaze would be taken as insolence. No gesture in the movie is as telling as the haste with which Saul, during the opening scene, snatches off his cap and freezes to the spot, head lowered, after bump-

ing by accident into a German soldier. Fear of repercussion is a habit.

These continual closeups of Saul serve a solemn purpose. They reinforce the sense that one man's testimony is enough. There is no way in which the film (or a hundred films) could represent the breadth of the communal suffering in the camp. All we can hope for is that the experience—the literal viewpoint—of a single witness can be added to the record. By homing in on Saul, and on the range of response in his dark eyes, we are made so aware of the monstrosities around him that we do not need to have them spelled out. Bare dead bodies are glimpsed, often fleetingly, at the sides of the frame. The newcomers, who are told that hot soup and a shower await them, and who are then stripped and herded toward the gas chambers, with the help of the Sonderkommando, are seldom in focus, and the same is true of the corpses borne to the furnaces. This strikes me as merciful and right. The question is not one of taste but of imaginative modesty; to watch most feature films—as opposed to documentaries—about the Holocaust, even those as expert as "Schindler's List," is to be left with a lasting moral queasiness about the limits of dramatic reconstruction. Just because you can attempt a thorough depiction of a death camp doesn't mean that you should; if your audience goes away convinced that it now knows what went on at Auschwitz, you've done something wrong. That is why I admire the judiciousness of Nemes. He gives us only shards.

The remarkable thing is that "Son

of Saul" is a début: Nemes has never directed a full-length film before. As for Röhrig, he is a poet as well as an actor, born in Budapest and now living in the Bronx. If neither of them made another movie, this one would suffice. Should you wish to grapple with its form, you might suggest that Nemes twines together too many narrative strands; there is a subplot about an uprising planned among the Sonderkommando, plus a private mission undertaken by Saul, concerning a boy whom he recognizes, in the gas chambers, as his son. The father cares nothing for himself, but his entire being is bent on finding a rabbi who will say Kaddish for the child. All this takes place in a mere two days. Could Nemes have made the work more spare, choosing a random day on which nothing occurred but the ritual toil of horror, like the scrubbing of bloody floors? Maybe so, yet the film is designed not simply to attest but to protest: to ascribe both dignity and identity to the living rebels, as to the deceased boy, and thereby to refute, with a quiet fury, the Germans who are heard referring to the bodies of the Jews as "pieces." Primo Levi, in "The Drowned and the Saved," argues that the use of the Sonderkommando was the "most demonic crime" of the Nazis. He called it "an attempt to shift onto others—specifically, the victims—the burden of guilt, so that they were deprived of even the solace of innocence." That is the solace that "Son of Saul" seeks to restore. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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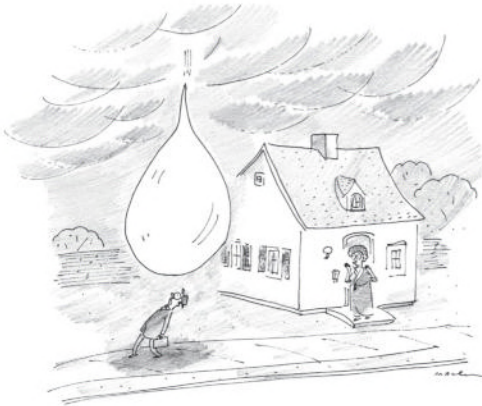
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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Joe Dator, must be received by Sunday, December 27th. The finalists in the December 7th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 11th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

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